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## NINETEEN TWENTY-ONE AND THE FIRST IMPRISONMENT

Nineteen Twenty-one was an extraordinary year for us. There was a strange mixture of nationalism and politics and religion and mysticism and fanaticism. Behind all this was agrarian trouble and, in the big cities, a rising working-class movement. Nationalism and a vague but intense country-wide idealism sought to bring together all these various, and sometimes mutually contradictory, discontents, and succeeded to a remarkable degree. And yet this nationalism itself was a composite force, and behind it could be distinguished a Hindu nationalism, a Muslim nationalism partly looking beyond the frontiers of India, and, what was more in consonance with the spirit of the times, an Indian nationalism. For the time being they overlapped and all pulled together. It was *Hindu-Musalman ki Jai* everywhere. It was remarkable how Gandhiji seemed to cast a spell on all classes and groups of people and drew them into one motley crowd struggling in one direction.

He became, indeed (to use a phrase which has been applied to another leader), "a symbolic expression of the confused desires of the people".

Even more remarkable was the fact that these desires and passions were relatively free from hatred of the alien rulers against whom they were directed. Nationalism is essentially an "anti" feeling, and it feeds and fattens on hatred and anger against other national groups, and especially against the foreign rulers of a subject country. There was certainly the hatred and anger in India in 1921 against the British but, in comparison with other countries similarly situated, it was extraordinarily little. Undoubtedly this was due to Gandhiji's insistence on the implications of non-violence. It was also due to the feeling of release and power that came to the whole country with the inauguration of the movement and the widespread belief in success in the near future. Why be angry and full of hate when we were doing so well and were likely to win through soon? We felt that we could afford to be generous.

We were not so generous in our hearts, though our actions were circumspect and proper, towards the handful of our own coun-

trymen who took sides against us and opposed the national movement. It was not a question of hatred or anger, for they carried no weight whatever and we could ignore them. But deep within us was contempt for their weakness and opportunism and betrayal of national honour and self-respect.

So we went on, vaguely but intensely, the exhilaration of action holding us in its grip. But about our goal there was an entire absence of clear thinking. It seems surprising now, how completely we ignored the theoretical aspects, the philosophy of our movement as well as the definite objective that we should have. Of course we all grew eloquent about Swaraj, but each one of us probably interpreted the word in his or her own way. To most of the younger men it meant political independence, or something like it, and a democratic form of government, and we said so in our public utterances. Many of us also thought that inevitably this would result in a lessening of the burdens that crushed the workers and the peasantry. But it was obvious that to most of our leaders Swaraj meant something much less than independence. Gandhiji was delightfully vague on the subject, and he did not encourage clear

thinking about it either. But he always spoke, vaguely but definitely, in terms of the under-dog, and this brought great comfort to many of us, although, at the same time, he was full of assurances to the top dog also. Gandhiji's stress was never on the intellectual approach to a problem but on character and piety. He did succeed amazingly in giving backbone and character to the Indian people. There were many, however, who developed neither much back-bone nor character, but who imagined that a limp body and a flabby look might be the outward semblance of piety.

It was this extraordinary stiffening-up of the masses that filled us with confidence. A demoralized, backward, and broken up people suddenly straightened their backs and lifted their heads and took part in disciplined, joint action on a country-wide scale. This action itself, we felt, would give irresistible power to the masses. We ignored the necessity of thought behind the action ; we forgot that without a conscious ideology and objective the energy and enthusiasm of the masses must end largely in smoke. To some extent the revivalist element in our movement carried us on ; a feeling that non-vio-

lence as conceived for political or economic movements or for righting wrongs was a new message which our people were destined to give to the world.) We became victims to the curious illusion of all peoples and all nations that in some way they are a chosen race. Non-violence was the moral equivalent of war and of all violent struggle. It was not merely an ethical alternative, but it was effective also. Few of us, I think, accepted Gandhiji's old ideas about machinery and modern civilization. We thought that even he looked upon them as utopian and as largely inapplicable to modern conditions. Certainly most of us were not prepared to reject the achievements of modern civilization, although we may have felt that some variation to suit Indian conditions was possible. Personally, I have always felt attracted towards big machinery and fast travelling. Still there can be no doubt that Gandhiji's ideology influenced many people and made them critical of the machine and all its consequences. So, while some looked to the future, others looked back to the past. And, curiously, both felt that the joint action they were indulging in was worth while, and this made it easy to bear sacrifice and face self-

denial.

I became wholly absorbed and wrapt in the movement, and large numbers of other people did likewise. I gave up all my other associations and contacts, old friends, books, even newspapers, except in so far as they dealt with the work in hand. I had kept up till then some reading of current books and had tried to follow the developments of world affairs. But there was no time for this now. In spite of the strength of my family bonds, I almost forgot my family, my wife, my daughter. It was only long afterwards that I realised what a burden and a trial I must have been to them in those days, and what amazing patience and tolerance my wife had shown towards me. I lived in offices and committee meetings and crowds. "Go to the villages" was the slogan, and we trudged many a mile across fields and visited distant villages and addressed peasant meetings. I experienced the thrill of mass-feeling, the power of influencing the mass. I began to understand a little the psychology of the crowd, the difference between the city masses and the peasantry, and I felt at home in the dust and discomfort, the pushing and jostling of large gatherings, though their

want of discipline often irritated me. Since those days I have sometimes had to face hostile and angry crowds, worked up to a state when a spark would light a flame, and I found that that early experience and the confidence it begot in me stood me in good stead. Always I went straight to the crowd and trusted it, and so far I have always had courtesy and appreciation from it, even though there was no agreement. But crowds are fickle, and the future may have different experiences in store for me.

I took to the crowd and the crowd took to me, and yet I never lost myself in it ; always I felt apart from it. From my separate mental perch I looked at it critically, and I never ceased to wonder how I, who was so different in every way from those thousands who surrounded me, different in habits, in desires, in mental and spiritual outlook, how I had managed to gain goodwill and a measure of confidence from these people. Was it because they took me for something other than I was ? Would they bear with me when they knew me better ? Was I gaining their goodwill under false pretences ? I tried to be frank and straightforward to them ; I even spoke harshly to them sometimes and critici-

sed many of their pet beliefs and customs, but still they put up with me. And yet I could not get rid of the idea that their affection was meant not for me as I was, but for some fanciful image of me that they had formed. How long could that false image endure? And why should it be allowed to endure? And when it fell down and they saw the reality, what then?

I am vain enough in many ways, but there could be no question of vanity with these crowds of simple folk. There was no posing about them, no vulgarity, as in the case of many of us of the middle classes who consider ourselves their betters. They were dull certainly, uninteresting individually, but in the mass they produced a feeling of overwhelming pity and a sense of ever-impending tragedy.

Very different were our conferences where our chosen workers, including myself, performed on the platform. There was sufficient posing there and no lack of vulgarity in our flamboyant addresses. All of us must have been to some extent guilty of this, but some of the minor Khilafat leaders probably led the rest. It is not easy to behave naturally on a platform before a large audience,

and few of us had previous experience of such publicity. So we tried to look, as we imagined leaders should look, thoughtful and serious, with no trace of levity or frivolity. When we walked or talked or smiled we were conscious of thousands of eyes staring at us and we reacted accordingly. Our speeches were often very eloquent but, equally often, singularly pointless. It is difficult to see oneself as others see one. And so, unable to criticise myself, I took to watching carefully the ways of others, and I found considerable amusement in this occupation. And then the terrible thought would strike me that I might perhaps appear equally ludicrous to others.

Right through the year 1921 individual Congress workers were being arrested and sentenced, but there were no mass arrests. The Ali Brothers had received long sentences for inciting the Indian Army to disaffection. Their words, for which they had been sentenced, were repeated at hundreds of platforms by thousands of persons. I was threatened in the summer with proceedings for sedition because of some speeches I had delivered. No such step, however, was taken then. The end of the year brought matters

to a head. The Prince of Wales was coming to India, and the Congress had proclaimed a boycott of all the functions in connection with his visit. Towards the end of November the Congress volunteers in Bengal were declared illegal and this was followed by a similar declaration for the United Provinces. Deshbandhu Das gave a stirring message to Bengal. "I feel the handcuffs on my wrists and the weight of iron chains on my body. It is the agony of bondage. The whole of India is a vast prison. The work of the Congress must be carried on. What matters it whether I am taken or left ? What matters it whether I am dead or alive?" In the U. P. we took up the challenge and not only announced that our volunteer organisation would continue to function, but published lists of names of volunteers in the daily newspapers. The first list was headed by my father's name. He was not a volunteer but, simply for the purpose of defying the Government order, he joined and gave his name. Early in December, a few days before the Prince came to our province, mass arrests began.

We knew that matters had at last come to a head; the inevitable conflict between the

Congress and the Government was about to break out. Prison was still an unknown place, the idea of going there still a novelty. I was sitting rather late one day in the Congress office at Allahabad trying to clear up arrears of work. An excited clerk told me that the police had come with a search warrant and were surrounding the office building. I was, of course, a little excited also, for it was my first experience of the kind, but the desire to show off was strong, the wish to appear perfectly cool and collected, unaffected by the comings and goings of the police. So I asked a clerk to accompany the police officer in his search round the office rooms, and insisted on the rest of the staff carrying on their usual work and ignoring the police. A little later a friend and a colleague, who had been arrested just outside the office, came to me, accompanied by a policeman, to bid me good-bye. I was so full of the conceit that I must treat these novel occurrences as everyday happenings that I treated my colleague in a most unfeeling manner. Casually I asked him and the policeman to wait till I had finished the letter I was writing. Soon news came of other arrests in the city. I decided at last to go home and see what was

happening there. I found the inevitable police searching part of the large house and learnt that they had come to arrest both father and me.

Nothing that we could have done would have fitted in so well with our programme of boycotting the Prince's visit. Wherever he was taken he was met with *hartals* and deserted streets. Allahabad, when he came, seemed to be a city of the dead; Calcutta, a few days later, suddenly put a temporary stop to all the activities of a great city. It was hard on the Prince of Wales; he was not to blame, and there was no feeling against him whatever. But the Government of India had tried to exploit his personality to prop up their decaying prestige.

There was an orgy of arrests and convictions, especially in the United Provinces and in Bengal. All the prominent Congress leaders and workers in these provinces were arrested, and ordinary volunteers by the thousand went to prison. They were, at first, largely city men and there seemed to be an inexhaustible supply of volunteers for prison. The U. P. Provincial Congress Committee was arrested *en bloc* (55 members) as they were actually holding a committee meeting.

Many people, who had so far taken no part in any Congress or political activity, were carried away by the wave of enthusiasm and insisted on being arrested. There were cases of Government clerks, returning from their offices in the evening, being swept away by this current and landing in gaol instead of their homes. Young men and boys would crowd inside the police lorries and refuse to come out. Every evening we could hear from inside the gaol lorry after lorry arriving outside heralded by our slogans and shouts. The gaols were crowded and the gaol officials were at their wits' ends at this extraordinary phenomenon. It happened sometimes that a police lorry would bring, according to the warrant accompanying it, a certain number of prisoners—no names were or could be mentioned. Actually, a larger number than mentioned would emerge from the lorry and that the gaol officials did not know how to meet this novel situation. There was nothing in the *Jail Manual* about it.

Gradually the Government gave up the policy of indiscriminate arrests; only noted workers were picked out. Gradually also the first flush of enthusiasm of the people cooled down and, owing to the absence in prison of

all the trusted workers, a feeling of indecision and helplessness spread. But the change was superficial only, and there was still thunder in the air and the atmosphere was tense and pregnant with revolutionary possibilities. During the months of December 1921 and January 1922 it is estimated that about thirty thousand persons were sentenced to imprisonment in connection with the non-co-operation movement. But though most of the prominent men and workers were in prison, the leader of the whole struggle, Mahatma Gandhi was still out, issuing from day to day messages and directions which inspired the people, as well as checking many an undesirable activity. The Government had not touched him so far, for they feared the consequences, the reactions on the Indian Army and the police.

Suddenly, early in February 1922, the whole scene shifted, and we in prison learnt to our amazement and consternation, that Gandhiji had stopped the aggressive aspects of our struggle, that he had suspended civil resistance. We read that this was because of what had happened near the village of Chauri Chaura where a mob of villagers had retaliated on some policemen by setting fire

to the police-station and burning half a dozen or so policemen in it.

We were angry when we learnt of this stoppage of our struggle at a time when we seemed to be consolidating our position and advancing on all fronts. But our disappointment and anger in prison could do little good to any one and civil resistance stopped and non-co-operation wilted away. After many months of strain and anxiety the Government breathed again, and for the first time had the opportunity of taking the initiative. A few weeks later they arrested Gandhiji and sentenced him for a long term of imprisonment.

Thousands of these have gone in and out many a time; they have got to know well what to expect inside; they have tried to adapt themselves to the strange life there, as far as one can adapt oneself to an existence full of abnormality and a dull suffering and a dreadful monotony. We grow accustomed to it, as one grows accustomed to almost anything; and yet every time that we enter those gates again, there is a bit of the old excitement, a feeling of tension, a quickening of the pulse. And the eyes turn back involuntarily to take a last good look outside at the greenery and wide spaces, and people and conveyances moving about, and familiar faces that they may not see again for a long time.

My first term in gaol, which ended rather suddenly after three months, was a hectic period both for us and the gaol staff. The gaol officials were half paralysed by the influx of the new type of convict. The number itself of these newcomers, added to from day to day, was extraordinary and created an impression of a flood which might sweep away the old traditional landmarks. More upsetting still was the type of the newcomers. They came from all classes, but had a high proportion of the middle class. All these

classes, however, had this in common : they differed entirely from the ordinary convict and it was not easy to treat them in the old way. This was recognised by the authorities, but there was nothing to take the place of the existing rules; there were no precedents and no experience. The average Congress prisoner was not very meek and mild, and even inside the gaol walls numbers gave him a feeling of strength. The agitation outside, and the new interest of the public in what transpired inside the prisons, added to this. In spite of this somewhat aggressive attitude, our general policy was one of co-operation with the gaol authorities. But for our help, the troubles of the officials would have been far greater. The gaoler would come to us frequently and ask us to visit some of the barracks containing our volunteers in order to soothe them or get them to agree to something.

We had come to prison of our own accord, many of the volunteers indeed having pushed their way in almost uninvited. There was thus hardly any question of any one of them trying to escape. If he had any desire to go out, he could do so easily by expressing regret for his action or giving an undertaking

that he would refrain from such activity in future. An attempt to escape would only bring a measure of ignominy, and in itself was tantamount to a withdrawal from political activity of the civil resistance variety. The superintendent of prison in Lucknow fully appreciated this and used to tell the gaoler (who was a Khan Sahib) that if he could succeed in allowing some of the Congress prisoners to escape he, the superintendent, would recommend him to Government for the title of Khan Bahadur.

Most of our fellow-prisoners were kept in huge barracks in the inner circle of the prison. About eighteen of us, selected I suppose for better treatment, were kept in an old weaving shed with a large open space attached. My father, two of my cousins, and I had a small shed to ourselves, about 20 feet by 16. We had considerable freedom in moving about from one barrack to another. Frequent interviews with relatives outside were allowed. Newspapers came, and the daily news of fresh arrests and the developments of our struggle kept up an atmosphere of excitement. Mutual discussions and talks took up a lot of time, and I could do little reading or other solid work. I spent the mornings in a

thorough cleaning and washing of our shed in washing father's and my own clothes, and in spinning. It was winter, the best time of year in North India. For the first few weeks we were allowed to open classes for our volunteers, or such of them as were illiterate, to teach them Hindi and Urdu and other elementary subjects. In the afternoons we played volley-ball<sup>1</sup>.

Gradually restrictions grew. We were stopped from going outside our enclosure and visiting the part of the gaol where most of our volunteers were kept. The classes naturally stopped. I was discharged about that time.

I went out early in March, and six or seven weeks later, in April, I returned. I found that the conditions had greatly changed. Father had been transferred to the Naini Tal Gaol and, soon after his departure, new

<sup>1</sup>A ridiculous story has appeared in the Press, and though contradicted, continues to appear from time to time. According to this, Sir Harcourt Butler, the then Governor of the U. P., sent champagne to my father in prison. Sir Harcourt sent my father nothing at all in prison; nobody sent him champagne or any other alcoholic drink; and indeed he had given up alcohol in 1920 after the Congress took to non-cooperation, and was not taking any such drinks at that time.

rules were enforced. All the prisoners in the big weaving shed, where I had been kept previously, were transferred to the inner gaol and kept in the barracks (single halls) there. Each barrack was practically a gaol within a gaol, and no communications were allowed between different barracks. Interviews and letters were now restricted to one a month. The food was much simpler though we were allowed to supplement it from outside.

In the barrack in which I was kept there must have been about fifty persons. We were all crowded together, our beds being about three or four feet from each other. Fortunately almost everybody in that barrack was known to me, and there were many friends. But the utter want of privacy, all day and night, became more and more difficult to endure. Always the same crowd looking on the same petty annoyances and irritations and no escape from them to a quiet nook. We bathed in public and washed our clothes in public, and ran round and round the barrack for exercise, and talked and argued till we had largely exhausted each other's capacity for intelligent conversation. It was the dull side of family life, magnified a hundred-

fold, with few of its graces and compensations, and all this among people of all kinds and tastes. It was a great nervous strain for all of us, and often I yearned for solitude. In later years I was to have enough of this solitude and privacy in prison, when for months I would see no one except an occasional gaol official. Again I lived in a state of nervous tension, but this time I longed for suitable company. I thought then sometimes, almost with envy, of my crowded existence in the Lucknow District Gaol in 1922, and yet I knew well enough that of the two I preferred the solitude, provided at least that I could read and write.

And yet I must say that the company was unusually decent and pleasant, and we got on well together. But all of us, I suppose, got a little bored with the others occasionally and wanted to be away from them and have a little privacy. The nearest approach to privacy that I could get was by leaving my barrack and sitting in the open part of the enclosure. It was the monsoon season and it was usually possible to do so because of the clouds. I braved the heat and an occasional drizzle even, and spent as much time as possible outside the barrack.

Lying there in the open, I watched the skies and the clouds and I realised, better than I had ever done before, how amazingly beautiful were their changing hues.

"To watch the changing clouds, like clime in clime;  
Oh I sweet to lie and bless the luxury of time."

Time was not a luxury for us, it was more of a burden. But the time I spent in watching those ever-shifting monsoon clouds was filled with delight and a sense of relief. I had the joy of having made almost a discovery, and a feeling of escape from confinement. I do not know why that particular monsoon had that great effect on me; no previous or subsequent one has moved me in that way. I had seen and admired many a fine sunrise and sunset in the mountains and over the sea, and bathed in its glory, and felt stirred for the time being by its magnificence. Having seen it, I had almost taken it for granted and passed on to other things. But in gaol there were no sunrises or sunsets to be seen, the horizon was hidden from us, and late in the morning the hot-rayed sun emerged over our guardian walls. There were no colours anywhere, and our eyes hardened and grew dull at seeing always that same drab view of mud-coloured wall.

and barrack. They must have hungered for some light and shade and colouring, and when the monsoon clouds sailed gaily by, assuming fantastic shapes, and playing in a riot of colour, I gasped in surprised delight and watched them almost as if I was in a trance. Sometimes the clouds would break, and one saw through an opening in them that wonderful monsoon phenomenon, a dark blue of an amazing depth, which seemed to be a portion of infinity.

The restrictions on us gradually grew in number, and stricter rules were enforced. The Government, having got the measure of our movement, wanted us to experience the full extent of its displeasure with our temerity in having dared to challenge it. The introduction of new rules or the manner of their enforcement led to friction between the gaol authorities and the political prisoners. For several months nearly all of us—we were some hundreds at the time in that particular gaol—gave up our interviews as a protest. Evidently it was thought that some of us were the trouble makers, and so seven of us were transferred to a distant part of the gaol, quite cut off from the main barracks. Among those who were thus separated were Purushottam,

Das Tandon, Mahadev Desai, George Joseph, Balkrishna Sharma, Devadas Gandhi and I.

We were sent to a smaller enclosure, and there were some disadvantages in living there. But on the whole I was glad of the change. There was no crowding here; we could live in greater quiet and with more privacy. There was more time to read or do other work. We were cut off completely from our colleagues in other parts of the gaol as well as from the outside world, for newspapers were now stopped for all political prisoners.

Newspapers did not come to us, but some news from outside trickled through, as it always manages to trickle through in prison. Our monthly interviews and letters also brought us odd bits of information. We saw that our movement was at a low ebb outside. The magic moment had passed and success seemed to retire into the dim future. Outside the Congress was split into two factions—the pro-changers and no-changers. The former under the leadership of Deshbhandhu Das and my father, wanted the Congress to take part in the new elections to the central and provincial councils and, if possible, to capture these legislatures; the latter, led by C. Raja-

gopalachari, opposed any change of the old programme of non-co-operation. Gandhiji was of course, in prison at the time. The fine ideals of the movement which had carried us forward, as on the crest of an advancing tide, were being swamped by petty squabbles and intrigues for power. We realised how much easier it was to do great and venturesome deeds in moments of enthusiasm and excitement than to carry on from day to day when the glow was past. Our spirits were damped by the news from outside, and this, added to the various humours that prison produces, increased the strain of life there. But still there remained within us an inner feeling of satisfaction, that we had preserved our self-respect and dignity, that we had acted rightly whatever the consequences. The future was dim, but, whatever shape it might take it seemed that it would be the lot of many of us to spend a great part of our lives in prison. So we talked amongst ourselves, and I remember particularly a conversation with George Joseph in which we came to this conclusion. Since those days Joseph has drifted far apart from us and has even become a vigorous critic of our doings. I wonder if he ever remembers that talk we had on an av-

tumn evening in the Civil Ward of the Lucknow District Gaol?

We settled down to a routine of work and exercise. For exercise we used to run round and round the little enclosure, or two of us would draw water, like two bullocks yoked together, pulling a huge leather bucket from a well in our yard. In this way we watered a small vegetable garden in our enclosure. Most of us used to spin a little daily. But reading was my principal occupation during those winter days and long evenings. Almost always, whenever the superintendent visited us, he found me reading. This devotion to reading seemed to get on his nerves a little, and he remarked on it once, adding that, so far as he was concerned, he had practically finished his general reading at the age of twelve! No doubt this abstention on his part had been of use to that gallant English colonel in avoiding troublesome thoughts and perhaps it helped him subsequently in rising to the position of Inspector-General of Prisons in the United Provinces.

The long winter evening and the clear Indian sky attracted us to the stars and, with the help of some charts, we spotted many of them. Nightly we would await their appear-

ance and greet them with the satisfaction of seeing old acquaintances.

So we passed our time, and the days lengthened themselves into weeks, and the weeks became months. We grew accustomed to our routine existence. But in the world outside the real burden fell on our womenfolk, our mothers and wives and sisters. They wearied with the long waiting, and their very freedom seemed a reproach to them when their loved ones were behind prison bars.

Soon after our first arrest in December 1921 the police started paying frequent visits to Anand Bhawan, our house in Allahabad. They came to realise the fines which had been imposed on father and me. It was the Congress policy not to pay fines. So the police came day after day and attached and carried away bits of furniture. Indira, my four year old daughter, was greatly annoyed at this continuous process of despoliation and protested to the police and expressed her strong displeasure. I am afraid those early impressions are likely to colour her future views about the police force generally.

In the gaol every effort was made to keep us apart from the ordinary non-political convicts, special gaols being as a rule reserved

for politicals. But complete segregation was impossible, and we often came into touch with those prisoners and learnt from them, as well as directly, the realities of prison life in those days. It was a story of violence and widespread graft and corruption. The food was quite amazingly bad; I tried it repeatedly and found it quite uneatable. The staff was usually wholly incompetent and was paid very low salaries, but it had every opportunity to add to its income by extorting money on every conceivable occasion from the prisoners or their relatives. The duties and responsibilities of the gaoler and his assistants and the warders, as laid down by the Gaol Manual, were so many and so various that it was quite impossible for any person to discharge them conscientiously or competently. The general policy of the prison administration in the United Provinces (and probably in other provinces) had absolutely nothing to do with the reform of the prisoner or with teaching him good habits and useful trades. The object of prison labour was to harass the convict.<sup>1</sup> He was to be frightened and

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<sup>1</sup>Article 987 of the United Provinces Gaol Manual, which has now been removed from the new edition, stated that:

"Labour in a gaol should be considered primarily as

broken into blind submission; the idea was that he should carry away from prison a fear and a horror of it, so that he might avoid crime and a return to prison in the future.

There have been some changes in recent years for the better. Food has improved a little, so also clothing and other matters. This was largely due to the agitation carried on outside by political prisoners after their discharge. Non-co-operation also resulted in a substantial increase in the warders' salaries to give them an additional inducement to remain loyal to the *Sarkar*. A feeble effort is also made now to teach reading and writing to the boys and younger prisoners. But all these changes, welcome as they are, barely

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a means of punishment and not of employment only; neither should the question of its being highly remunerative have much weight, the object of paramount importance being that prison work should be irksome and laborious and a cause of dread to evil-doers."

This might be compared with the following articles of the Russian S. F. S. R. Criminal Code :

**Article 9.—**"The measures of social defence do not have for their object the infliction of physical suffering nor the lowering of human dignity, nor are they meant to avenge or to punish."

**Article 26.—**"Sentences, being a measure of protection must be free from any element of torture, and must not cause the criminal needless or superfluous suffering."

scratch the problem, and the old spirit remains much the same.

The great majority of the political prisoners had to put up with this regular treatment for ordinary prisoners. They had no special privileges or other treatment, but being more aggressive and intelligent than the others, they could not easily be exploited, nor could money be made out of them. Because of this they were naturally not popular with the staff and when occasion offered itself a breach of gaol discipline by any of them was punished severely. For such a breach a young boy of fifteen or sixteen, who called himself Azad, was ordered to be flogged. He was stripped and tied to the whipping triangle, and as each stripe fell on him and cut into his flesh he shouted "Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai". Every stripe brought forth the slogan till the boy fainted. Later, that boy was to become one of the leaders of the group of Terrorists in North India.

### III

## IN NAINI PRISON

I had gone back to gaol after nearly seven years, and memories of prison life had somewhat faded. I was in Naini Central Prison, one of the big prisons of the province, and I was to have the novel experience of being kept by myself. My enclosure was apart from the big enclosure containing the gaol population of between 2200 and 2300. It was a small enclosure, circular in shape, with a diameter of about one hundred feet, and with a circular wall about fifteen feet high surrounding it. In the middle of it was a drab and ugly building containing four cells. I was given two of these cells, connecting with each other, one to serve as a bathroom and lavatory. The others remained unoccupied for some time.

After the exciting and very active life I had been leading outside, I felt rather lonely and depressed. I was tired out, and for two or three days I slept a great deal. The hot weather had already begun, and I was permitted to sleep at night in the open, outside my cell in the narrow space between the

inner building and the enclosing wall. My bed was heavily chained up, lest I might take it up and walk away, or, more probably, to avoid the bed being used as a kind of scaling ladder to climb the wall of the enclosure. The nights were full of strange noises. The convict overseers, who gaurded the main wall frequently shouted to each other in varying keys, sometimes lengthening out their cries till they sounded like the moaning of a distant wind; the night-watchmen in the barracks were continually counting away in a loud voice the prisoners under their charge and shouting out that all was well; and several times a night some gaol official, going his rounds, visited our enclosure and shouted an enquiry to the warder on duty. As my enclosure was some distance away from the others, most of these voices reached me indistinctly, and I could not make out at first what they were. At times I felt as if I was on the verge of the forest, and the peasantry were shouting to keep the wild animals away from their fields; sometimes it seemed the forest itself and the beasts of the night were keeping up their nocturnal chorus.

Was it my fancy, I wonder, or is it a fact that a circular wall reminds one more of cap-

tivity than a rectangular one? The absence of corners and angles adds to the sense of oppression. In the daytime that wall even encroached on the sky and only allowed a glimpse of a narrow-bounded portion. With wistful eye I looked

"Upon that little tent of blue  
Which prisoners call the sky,  
And at every drifting cloud that went  
With sails of silver by."

At night that wall enclosed me all the more, and I felt as if I was at the bottom of a well. Or else that part of the star-lit sky that I saw ceased to be real and seemed part of an artificial planetarium.

My barrack and enclosure were popularly known throughout the gaol as the *Kuttahar* the Dog House. This was an old name which had nothing to do with me. The little barrack had been built originally, apart from all others, for especially dangerous criminals who had to be isolated. Latterly it had been used for political prisoners, detenus, and the like who could thus be kept apart from the rest of the gaol. In front of the enclosure, some distance away, was an erection that gave me a shock when I first had a glimpse of it from my barrack. It looked like a huge

cage, and men went round and round inside it, I found out later that it was a water-pump worked by human labour, as many as sixteen persons being employed at a time. I got used to it as one gets used to everything, but it has always seemed to me one of the most foolish and barbarous ways of utilising human labour-power. And whenever I pass it I think of the zoo.

For some days I was not permitted to go outside my enclosure for exercise or any other purpose. I was later allowed to go out for half an hour in the early mornings, when it was almost dark, and to walk or run under the main wall. That early morning hour had been fixed for me so that I might not come in contact with, or be seen by, the other prisoners. I liked that outing, and it refreshed me tremendously. In order to compress as much open air exercise as I could in the short time at my disposal, I took to running and gradually increased this to over two miles daily.

I used to get up very early in the morning about four, or even half-past three, when it was quite dark. Partly this was due to going to bed early, as the light provided was not good for much reading. I liked to watch the

stars, and the position of some well-known constellation would give me the approximate time. From where I lay I could just see the Pole Star peeping over the wall, and as it was always there, I found it extraordinarily comforting. Surrounded by a revolving sky it seemed to be a symbol of cheerful constancy and perseverance.

For a month I had no companion, but I was not alone, as I had the warder and the convict overseers and a convict cook and cleaner in my enclosure. Occasionally other prisoners came there on some business, most of them being convict overseers—C. O.'s—serving out long sentences. 'Lifers'—convicts sentenced for life—were common. Usually a life-sentence was supposed to terminate after twenty years, or even less, but there were many in prison then who had served more than twenty years already. I saw one very remarkable case in Naini. Prisoners carry about, attached to their clothes at the shoulder, little wooden boards giving information about their convictions and mentioning the date when release was due. On the board of one prisoner I read that his date of release was 1996! He had already, in 1930, served out several years, and he was then a

person of middle age. Probably he had been given several sentences and they had been added up one after the other; the total, I think, amounting to seventy-five years.

For years and years many of these 'lifers' do not see a child or woman, or even animals. They lose touch with the outside world completely, and have no human contacts left. They brood and wrap themselves in angry thoughts of fear and revenge and hatred; forget the good of the world, the kindness and joy, and live only wrapped up in the evil, till gradually even hatred loses its edge and life becomes a soulless thing, a machine-like routine. Like automatons they pass their days, each exactly like the other, and have few sensations, except one—fear! From time to time the prisoner's body is weighed and measured. But how is one to weigh the mind and the spirit which wilt and stunt themselves and wither away in this terrible atmosphere of oppression? People argue against the death penalty, and their arguments appeal to me greatly. But when I see the long drawn-out agony of a life spent in prison, I feel that it is perhaps better to have that penalty rather than to kill a person slowly and by degrees. One of the 'lifers' came up to me one

and asked me: "What of us lifers? Will Swaraj take us out of this hell?"

Who are these lifers? Many of them come in gang cases, when large numbers, as many as fifty or a hundred, may be convicted *en bloc*. Some of these are probably guilty, but I doubt if most of those convicted are really guilty; it is easy to get people involved in such cases. An approver's evidence, a little identification, is all that is needed. Dacoities are increasing nowadays and the prison population goes up year by year. If people starve, what are they to do? Judges and magistrates wax eloquent about the increase of crime, but are blind to the obvious economic causes of it.

Then there are the agriculturists who have a little village riot over some land dispute, *lathis* fly about, and somebody dies—result, many people in gaol for life or for a long term. Often all the menfolk in a family will be imprisoned in this way, leaving the women to carry on as best they can. Not one of these is a criminal type. Generally they are fine young men, considerably above the average villager, both physically and mentally. A little training, some diversion of interest to other subjects and jobs, and these

people would be valuable assets to the country.

Indian prisons contain, of course, hardened criminals, persons who are aggressively anti-social and dangerous to the community. But I have been amazed to find large numbers of fine types in prison, boys and men, whom I would trust unhesitatingly. I do not know what the proportion of real criminals to non-criminal types is, and probably no one in the prison department has ever even thought of this distinction. Some interesting figures are given on this subject by Lewis E. Lawes, the Warden of Sing Sing Prison in New York. He says of his prison population, that to his knowledge 50 per cent. are not criminally inclined at all; that 25 per cent. are the products of circumstances and environments; that of the remaining 25 per cent. only a possible half that is  $12\frac{1}{2}$  per cent., are aggressively anti-social. It is a well-known fact that real criminality flourishes more in the big cities and centres of modern civilisation than in the undeveloped countries. American gangsterdom is notorious, and Sing Sing has a special reputation as a prison where some of the worst criminals go. And yet, according to its warden, only  $12\frac{1}{2}$  per cent.

of its prisoners are really bad. I think it may very safely be said that this proportion is far less in an Indian prison. A more sensible economic policy, more employment, more education would soon empty out our prisons. But of course to make that successful, a radical plan, affecting the whole of our social fabric, is essential. The only other real alternative is what the British Government is doing: increasing its police forces and enlarging its prisons in India. The number of persons sent to gaol in India is appalling. In a recent report issued by the Secretary of the All-India Prisoners' Aid Society, it is stated that in the Bombay Presidency alone 128,000 persons were sent to gaol in 1933, and the figure for Bengal for the same year was 124,000<sup>1</sup>. I do not know the figures for all the provinces, but if the total for two provinces exceeds a quarter of a million, it is quite possible that the All-India total approaches the million mark. This figure does not of course, represent the permanent gaol population, for a large number of persons get short sentences. The permanent population will be very much less, but still it must be enormous. Some of the major provinces in

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<sup>1</sup> Statesman, December 12, 1934.

India are said to have the biggest prison administrations in the world. The U. P. is among those supposed to have this doubtful honour, and very probably it is, or was, one of the most backward and reactionary administrations. Not the least effort is made to consider the prisoner as an individual, a human being, and to improve or look after his mind. The one thing the U. P. administration excels in is keeping its prisoners. There are remarkably few attempts to escape, and I doubt if one in ten thousand succeeds in escaping.

One of the most saddening features of the prisons is the large number of boys, from fifteen upwards, who are to be found in them. Most of them are bright-looking lads who, if given the chance, might easily make good. Lately some beginnings have been made to teach them the elements of reading and writing but, as usual, these are absurdly inadequate and inefficient. There are very few opportunities for games or recreation, no newspapers of any kind are permitted nor are books encouraged. For twelve hours or more all prisoners are kept locked up in their barracks or cells with nothing whatever to do in the long evenings.

Interviews are only permitted once in three months, and so are letters—a monstrously long period. Even so, many prisoners cannot take advantage of them. If they are illiterate, as most are, they have to rely on some gaol official to write on their behalf; and the latter, not being keen on adding to his other work, usually avoids it. Or, if a letter is written, the address is incorrect and the letter does not reach its destination. Interviews are still more difficult. Almost invariably they depend on a gratification for some gaol official. Often prisoners are transferred to different gaols, and their people cannot trace them. I have met many prisoners who had lost complete touch with their families for years, and did not know what had happened. Interviews, when they do take place after three months or more, are most extraordinary. A number of prisoners and their interviewers are placed together on either side of a barrier, and they all try to talk simultaneously. There is a great deal of shouting at each other, and the slight human touch that might have come from the interview is entirely absent.

A very small number of prisoners, ordinarily not exceeding one in a thousand (Euro-

peans excepted), are given some extra privileges in the shape of better food and more frequent interviews and letters. During a big political civil resistance movement, when scores of thousands of political prisoners go to gaol, this figure of special class prisoners goes up slightly, but even so it is very low. About 95 per cent. of these political prisoners, men and women, are treated in the ordinary way and are not given even these facilities.

Some individuals, sentenced for revolutionary activities for life or long terms of imprisonment, are often kept in solitary confinement for long periods. In the U. P., I believe, all such persons are automatically kept in solitary cellular confinement. Ordinarily, this solitary confinement is awarded as a special punishment for a prison offence. But in the case of these persons—usually young boys—they are kept alone although their behaviour in gaol might be exemplary. Thus an additional and very terrible punishment is added by the Gaol Department to the sentence of the court, without any reason therefor. This seems very extraordinary, and hardly in conformity with any rule of law. Solitary confinement, even for a short period, is

a most painful affair; for it to be prolonged for years is a terrible thing. It means the slow and continuous deterioration of the mind, till it begins to border on insanity; and the appearance of a look of vacancy, or a frightened animal type of expression. It is the killing of the spirit by degrees, the slow vivisection of the soul. Even if a man survives it, he becomes abnormal and an absolute misfit in the world. And the question always arises—was this man guilty at all of any act or offence? Police methods in India have long been suspect; in political matters they are doubly so.

European or Eurasian prisoners, whatever their crime or status, are automatically placed in a higher class and get better food, lighter work and more interviews and letters. A weekly visit from a clergyman keeps them in touch with outside affairs. The parson brings them foreign illustrated and humorous papers, and communicates with their families when necessary.

No one grudges the European convicts these privileges, for they are few enough, but it is a little painful to see the utter absence of any human standard in the treatment of others—men and women. The con-

vict is not thought of as an individual human being, and so he or she is seldom treated as such. One sees in prison the inhuman side of the State apparatus of administrative repression at its worst. It is a machine which works away callously and unthinkingly, crushing all that come in its grip, and the gaol rules have been purposely framed to keep this machine in evidence. Offered to sensitive men and women, this soulless regime is a torture and an anguish of the mind. I have seen long-term convicts sometimes breaking down at the dreariness of it all, and weeping like little children. And a word of sympathy and encouragement, so rare in this atmosphere, has suddenly made their faces light up with joy and gratitude.

And yet among the prisoners themselves there were often touching instances of charity and good comradeship. A blind 'habitual' prisoner was once discharged after thirteen years. After this long period he was going out, wholly unprovided for, into a friendless world. His fellow convicts were eager to help him, but they could not do much. One gave his shirt deposited in the gaol office, another some other piece of clothing. A third had that very morning received a new

pair of *chappals* (leather sandals) and he had shown them to me with some pride. It was a great acquisition in prison. But when he saw this blind companion of many years going out bare-footed, he willingly parted with his new *chappals*. I thought then that there appeared to be more charity inside the gaol than outside it.

That year 1930 was full of dramatic situations and inspiring happenings; what surprised most was the amazing power of Gandhiji to inspire and enthuse a whole people. There was something almost hypnotic about it, and we remembered the words used by Gokhale about him: how he had the power of making heroes out of clay. Peaceful civil disobedience as a technique of action for achieving great national ends seemed to have justified itself, and a quiet confidence grew in the country, shared by friend and opponent alike, that we were marching towards victory. A strange excitement filled those who were active in the movement, and some of this even crept inside the gaol. "Swaraj is coming!" said the ordinary convicts; and they waited impatiently for it, in the selfish hope that it might do them some good. The warders, coming in contact with the gossip

of the bazaars, also expected that *Swaraj* was near; the petty gaol official grew a little more nervous.

We had no daily newspapers in prison, but a Hindi weekly brought us some news, and often this news would set our imagination afire. Daily *lathi* charges, sometimes firing, martial law at Sholapur with sentences of ten years for carrying the national flag. We felt proud of our people, and especially of our womenfolk, all over the country. I had a special feeling of satisfaction because of the activities of my mother, wife and sisters, as well as many girl cousins and friends; and though I was separated from them and was in prison, we grew nearer to each other bound by a new sense of comradeship in a great cause. The family seemed to merge into a larger group, and yet to retain its old flavour and intimacy. Kamala surprised me, for her energy and enthusiasm overcame her physical ill-health and, for some time at least she kept well in spite of strenuous activities.

The thought that I was having a relatively easy time in prison, at a time when others were facing danger and suffering outside, began to oppress me. I longed to go out, and as I could not do that, I made my life in

prison a hard one, full of work. I used to spin daily for nearly three hours on my own *charkha*; for another two or three hours I did *newar* weaving, which I had especially asked for from the gaol authorities. I liked these activities. They kept me occupied without undue strain or requiring too much attention, and they soothed the fever of my mind. I read a great deal, and otherwise busied myself with cleaning up, washing my clothes, etc. The manual labour I did was of my own choice as my imprisonment was 'simple.'

And so, between thought of outside happenings and my gaol routine, I passed my days in Naini Prision. Watching the working of an Indian prison, it struck me that it was not unlike the British government of India. There is great efficiency in the apparatus of government, which goes to strengthen the hold of the Government on the country, and little or no care for the human material of the country. Outwardly the prison must appear efficiently run, and to some extent this was true. But no one seemed to think that the main purpose of the prison must be to improve and help the unhappy individuals who come to it. Break them!—that is the idea, so that by the time

they go out, they may not have the least bit of spirit left in them. And how is the prison controlled, and the convicts kept in check and punished ? Very largely with the help of the convicts themselves, some of whom are made convict-warders (C. W's.) or convict-overseers (C. O's.), and are induced to co-operate with the authorities because of fear, and in the hope of rewards and special remissions. There are relatively few paid non-convict-warders ; most of the guarding inside the prison is done by convict-warders and C.O's. A widespread system of spying pervades the prison, convicts being encouraged to become stool pigeons and to spy on each other; and no combination or joint action is, of course, permitted among the prisoners. This is easy to understand, for, only by keeping them divided up could they be kept in check.

Outside, in the government of our country, we see much of this duplicated on a larger, though less obvious, scale. But there the C'W's. or C.O's. are known differently. They have impressive titles, and their liveries of office are more gorgeous. And behind them, as in prison, stands the armed guard with weapons ever ready to

enforce conformity.

How important and essential is a prison to the modern State! The prisoner at least begins to think so, and the numerous administrative and other functions of the government appear almost superficial before the basic functions of the prison, the police, the army. In prison one begins to appreciate the Marxian theory, that the State is really the coercive apparatus meant to enforce the will of a group that controls the government.

For a month I was alone in my barrack. Then a companion came - Narmada Prasad Singh—and his coming was a relief. Two and a half months later, on the last day of June 1930, our little enclosure was the scene of unusual excitement. Unexpectedly, early in the morning, my father and Dr. Syed Mahmud, were brought there. They had both been arrested in Anand Bhawan, while they were actually in their beds, that morning.

## IV

### IN BAREILLY AND DEHRA DUN GAOLS

After six weeks in Naini Prison I was transferred to the Bareilly District Gaol. I was again in very indifferent health and, much to my annoyance, I used to get a daily rise in temperature. After four months spent in Bareilly, when the summer temperature was almost at its highest, I was again transferred, this time to a cooler place, Dehra Dun Gaol, at the foot of the Himalayas. There I remained, without a break, for fourteen and a half months, almost to the end of my two-year term. News reached me, of course, from interviews and letters and selected newspapers, but I was wholly out of touch with much that was happening and had only a hazy notion of the principal events.

When I was discharged I was kept busy with personal affairs as well as the political situation as I found it then. After a little more than five months of freedom I was brought back to prison, and here I am still. Thus, during the last three years I have been mostly in prison and out of touch with

events, and I have had little opportunity of making myself acquainted in any detail with all that has happened during this period. I have still the vaguest of knowledge as to what took place behind the scenes at the second Round Table Conference, which was attended by Gandhiji. I have had no chance so far of a talk with him on this subject, nor of discussing with him or others much that has happened since.

I do not know enough of those years 1932 and 1933 to trace the development of our national struggle. But I knew the stage and the background well and the actors also, and had an instinctive appreciation of many a little thing that happened. I could thus form a fair notion of the general course of the struggle. For the first four months or so civil disobedience functioned strongly and aggressively, and then there was a gradual decline with occasional bursts. A direct action struggle can only remain at a revolutionary pitch for a very short time. It cannot remain static; it has to go up or down. Civil disobedience, after the first flush, went down slowly, but it could carry on at a lower level for long periods. In spite of outlawry, the all-India Congress organisation continued

to function with a fair measure of success. It kept in touch with its provincial workers, sent instructions, received reports, occasionally gave financial assistance.

The provincial organisations also continued with more or less success. I do not know much about other provinces during those years when I was in prison, but I gathered some information about U. P. activities after my release. The U. P. Congress office functioned regularly right through 1932 and till the middle of 1933, when civil disobedience was first suspended by the then acting Congress president, on the advice of Gandhiji. During this period frequent directions were sent to districts, printed or cyclostyled bulletins issued regularly, district work inspected from time to time and our National Service workers paid their allowances. Much of this work was necessarily secret work; but the secretary of the Provincial Committee in charge of the office, etc., was always working as such, publicly, till he was arrested and removed and another took his place.

Our experience of 1930 and 1932 showed that it was easily possible for us to organise a secret network of information all over India.

Without much effort, and in spite of some opposition, good results were produced. But many of us had the feeling that secrecy did not fit in with the spirit of civil disobedience, and produced a damping effect on the mass consciousness. As a small part of a big open mass-movement it was useful, but there was always the danger, especially when the movement was declining, of a few more or less ineffective secret activities taking the place of the mass-movement. Gandhiji condemned all secrecy in July 1933.

Agrarian no-tax movements flourished for some time in Gujrat and the Karnatak, apart from the U. P. In both Gujrat and Karnatak there were peasant proprietors who refused to pay their revenue to the Government, and suffered greatly because of this. Some effort, necessarily inadequate, was made on behalf of the Congress to help the sufferers and relieve the misery caused by the ejections and confiscation of property. In the U. P. no effort to help the dispossessed tenantry in this way was made by the Provincial Congress. The problem here was a much vaster one (tenants are far more numerous than peasant proprietors) the area was much bigger, and the

were very limited. It was quite impossible for us to help scores of thousands who had suffered because of the compaign, and equally difficult for us to draw a line between them and the vast numbers who were always on the starvation line. To help a few thousands only would have led to trouble and bad blood. So we decided not to give financial assistance, and we broadcasted this fact right at the beginning, and our position was thoroughly appreciated by the peasantry. It was wonderful how much they put up with without complaint or murmur. Of course, we tried to help individuals where we could, especially the wives and children of workers who went to prison. Such is the poverty of this unhappy country that even one rupee per month was a godsend.

Right through this period the U. P. Provincial Committee (which was, of course, a proscribed body) continued to pay the usual meagre allowances to its paid workers; and if they went to prison, as all of them did in turn, to support their families. This was a major item in its budget. Then came the charge for printing and duplicating leaflets and bulletins ; this also was a heavy charge. Travelling expenses formed another principal

item, and some grants had to be given to the less prosperous districts. In spite of all these and other expenses during a period of intensive mass-struggle against a powerful and entrenched government, the total expenditure of the U.P. Provincial Committee for twenty months from January 1932 to the end of August 1933 was about Rs. 63,000, that is about Rs. 3140 per month. (This figure does not include the separate expenditure of some of the strong and more prosperous district committees like Allahabad, Agra, Cawnpore, Lucknow.) As a province, the U. P. kept in the very forefront of the struggle right through 1932 and 1933, and I think, considering the results obtained, it is remarkable how little it spent. It would be interesting to compare with this modest figure the provincial Government's special expenditure to crush civil disobedience. I imagine (though I have no knowledge) that some of the other major Congress provinces spent much more. But Behar was, from the Congress view-point, an even poorer province than its neighbour, the U. P., and yet its part in the struggle was a splendid one.

So, gradually, the civil disobedience-movement declined; but still it carried on, not

without distinction. Progressively it ceased to be a mass movement. Apart from the severity of Government repression, the first severe blow to it came in September 1932 when Gandhiji fasted for the first time on the Harijan issue. That fast roused mass consciousness, but it directed it in another direction. Civil disobedience was finally killed for all practical purposes by the suspension of it in May 1933. It continued after that more in theory than in practice. It is no doubt true that, even without that suspension, it would have gradually petered out. India was numbed by the violence and harshness of repression. The nervous energy of the nation as a whole was for the moment exhausted, and it was not being recharged. Individually there were still many who could carry on civil resistance, but they functioned in a somewhat artificial atmosphere.

It was not pleasant for us in prison to learn of this slow decay of a great movement. And yet very few of us had expected a flashing success. There was always an odd chance that something flashing might happen if there was an irrepressible upheaval the masses. But that was not to be counted upon, and so we looked forward to a long

struggle with ups and downs and many a stalemate in between, and a progressive strengthening of the masses in discipline and united action and ideology. Sometimes in those early days of 1932 I almost feared a quick and spectacular success, for this seemed to lead inevitably to a compromise leaving the 'Governmentarians' and opportunists at the top. The experience of 1931 had been revealing. Success to be worth while should come when the people generally were strong enough and clear enough in their ideas to take advantage of it. Otherwise the masses would fight and sacrifice and at the psychological moment, others would step in gracefully and gather the spoils. There was grave danger of this, because in the Congress itself there was a great deal of loose thinking and no clear ideas as to what system of government or society we were driving at. Some Congressmen, indeed, did not think of changing the existing system of government much, but simply of replacing the British or alien element in it by the *swadeshi* brand.

The 'Governmentarians' of the pure variety did not matter much, for their first article of faith was subservience to the State authority

whatever it was. But even the Liberals and Responsivists accepted the ideology of the British Government almost completely; and their occasional criticism, such as it was, was thus wholly ineffective and valueless. It was well known that they were legalists at any price, and as such they could not welcome civil resistance. But they went much further, and more or less ranged themselves on the side of the Government. They were almost silent and rather frightened spectators of the complete suppression of civil liberties of all kinds. It was not merely a question of civil disobedience being countered and suppressed by the Government, but of all political life and public activity being stopped, and hardly a voice was raised against this. Those who usually stood for these liberties were involved in the struggle itself, and they took the penalties for refusing to submit to the State's coercion. Others were cowed into abject submission, and hardly raised their voices in criticism. Mild criticism, when it was indulged in, was apologetic in tone and was accompanied by strong denunciation of the Congress and those who were carrying on the struggle.

In Western countries a strong public

opinion has been built up in favour of civil liberties, and any limitation of them is resented and opposed. (Perhaps this is past history now.) there are large numbers of people who, though not prepared to participate in strong and direct action themselves care enough for the liberty of speech and writing, assembly and organisation, person and press, to agitate for them ceaselessly and thus help to check the tendency of the State to encroach upon them. The Indian Liberals claim to some extent to carry on the traditions of British Liberalism (although they have nothing in common with them except the name), and might have been expected to put up some intellectual opposition to the suppression of these liberties for they suffered from this also. But they played no such part. It was not for them to say with Voltaire: "I disagree absolutely with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it."

It is not perhaps fair to blame them for this, for they have never stood out as the champions of democracy or liberty, and they had to face a situation in which a loose word might have got them into trouble. It is more pertinent to observe the reactions of

those ancient lovers of liberty, the British Liberals, and the new socialists of the British Labour Party to repression in India. They managed to contemplate the Indian scene with a certain measure of equanimity, painful as it was, and sometimes their satisfaction at the success of the "scientific application of repression," as a correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* put it, was evident. Recently the National Government of Great Britain has sought to pass a Sedition Bill, and a great deal of criticism has been directed to it, especially from Liberals and Labourites on the ground, *inter alia*, that it restricts free speech and gives magistrates the right of issuing warrants for searches. Whenever I read this criticism I sympathised with it, and I had at the same time the picture of India before me, where the actual laws in force to-day are approximately a hundred times worse than the British Sedition Bill seeks to enact. I wondered how it was that Britishers who strain at a gnat in England could swallow a camel in India without turning a hair. Indeed I have always wondered at and admired the astonishing knack of the British people of making their moral standards correspond with their

material interests, and of seeing virtue in everything that advances their imperial designs. Mussolini and Hitler are condemned by them in perfect good faith and with righteous indignation for their attacks on liberty and democracy ; and in equal good faith, similar attacks and deprivation of liberty in India seem to them as necessary, and the highest moral reasons are advanced to show that true disinterested behaviour on their part demands them.

While fire raged all over India and men's and women's souls were put to the test, far away in London the chosen ones forgathered to draw up a constitution for India. There was the third Round Table Conference in 1932 and numerous committees, and large numbers of members of the Legislative Assembly angled for membership of these committees so that they might thus combine public duty with private pleasure. Quite a crowd went at the public expense. Later, in 1933, came the Joint Committee with its Indian assessors, and again free passages were provided by a benevolent Government to those who went as witnesses. Many people crossed the seas again at public cost in their earnest desire to serve India, and some, it

was stated, even haggled for more passage money.

It was not surprising to see these representatives of vested interests, frightened by the mass movements of India in action, gathering together in London under the aegis of British imperialism. But it hurt the nationalism in us to see any Indian behave in this way when the mother country was involved in a life-and-death struggle. And yet from one point of view it seemed to many of us a good thing, for it separated once and for all, as we thought (wrongly, it now appears), the reactionary from the progressive elements in India. This sifting would help in the political education of the masses, and make it clearer still to all concerned, that only through independence could we hope to face social issues and raise the burdens from the masses.

But it was surprising to find how far these people had alienated themselves, not only in their day-to-day lives, but morally and mentally, from the Indian masses. There were no links with them, no understanding of them or of that inner urge which was driving them to sacrifice and suffering. Reality for these distinguished statesmen

consisted of one thing—British imperial power, which could not be successfully challenged and therefore should be accepted with good or bad grace. It did not seem to strike them that it was quite impossible for them to solve India's problem or draw up a real live constitution without the good will of the masses. Mr. J. A. Spender, in his recent *Short History of Our Times*, refers to the failure of the Irish Joint Conference of 1910 which sought to end the constitutional crisis. He says that the political leaders who were trying to find a constitution in the midst of a crisis were like men trying to insure a house when it is on fire. The fire in India in 1932 and 1933 was far greater than in Ireland in 1910, and even though the flames die down, the burning embers will remain for a long time; hot and unquenchable as India's will to freedom.

In India there was an amazing growth of the spirit of violence in official circles. The tradition was an old one, and the country had been governed by the British mainly as a police state. The overriding outlook even of the civilian ruler had been military; there was always a touch of a hostile army occupying alien and conquered soil. This

mentality grew because of the serious challenge to the existing order. The occasional acts of terrorism in Bengal or elsewhere fed this official violence, and gave it some justification for its own acts. The various ordinances and the Government policy gave such tremendous power to the executive and the police, that in effect India was under Police Raj and there were hardly any checks.

To a greater or less degree all the provinces of India went through this fire of fierce repression, but the Frontier Province and Bengal suffered most. The Frontier Province had always been a predominantly military area, administered under semi-military regulations. Its strategic position was important, and the 'Redshirt' movement had thoroughly upset the Government. Military columns were very much in evidence in the 'pacification' of the province, and in dealing with 'recalcitrant villages'. It was a common practice all over India to impose heavy collective fines on villages, and occasionally (in Bengal especially) on towns. Punitive police were often stationed, and police excesses were inevitable when they had enormous powers and no checks. We

had typical instances of the lawlessness and disorderliness of law and order.

Parts of Bengal presented the most extraordinary spectacle. Government treated the whole populations (or, to be exact, the Hindu population) as hostile, and everyone—man, woman, boy or girl between 12 and 25—had to carry identity cards. There were exterrnments and internments in the mass, dress was regulated, schools were regulated or closed, bicycles were not allowed, movements had to be reported to the police, curfew, sunset law, military marches, punitive police, collective fines, and a host of other rules were instituted. Large areas seemed to be in a continuous state of siege, and the inhabitants were little better than ticket-of-leave men and women under the strictest surveillance. Whether, from the point of view of the British Government, all these amazing provisions and regulations were necessary or not, it is not for me to judge. If they were not necessary, then that Government must be held guilty of a grave offence in oppressing and humiliating and causing great loss to the populations of whole areas. If they were necessary then surely that is the final verdict on British rule in India.

The spirit of violence pursued our people even within the gaols. The class division of prisoners was a farce, and often a torture for those who were put in an upper class. Very few went to these upper classes, and many a sensitive man and woman had to submit to conditions which were a continuing agony. The deliberate policy of Government seems to have been to make the lot of political prisoners worse than that of ordinary convicts. An Inspector-General of Prisons went to the length of issuing a confidential circular to all the prisons, pointing out that Civil Disobedience prisoners must be "dealt with grimly."<sup>1</sup> Whipping became a frequent gaol punishment. On April 27, 1933, the Under Secretary for India stated in the House of Commons "that Sir Samuel Hoare was aware that over 500 persons in India were whipped during 1932 for offences in connection with the civil disobedience movement." It is not clear if this figure includes the many whippings in prisons for

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<sup>1</sup> This circular was dated June 30, 1932, and it contained the following: "The Inspector-General impresses upon Superintendents and gaol subordinates the fact that there is no justification for preferential treatment in favour of Civil Disobedience Movement prisoners as such. This class require to be kept in their places and dealt with grimly."

breaches of gaol discipline. As news of frequent whippings came to us in prison in 1932, I remembered our protest and our three-day fast in December 1930 against one or two odd instances of whipping. I had felt shocked then at the brutality of it, and now I was still shocked and there was a dull pain inside me, but it did not strike me that I should protest and fast again. I felt much more helpless in the matter. The mind gets blunted to brutality after a while. A bad thing has only to continue for long for the world to get used to it.

The hardest of labour was given to our men in prison—mills, oil-presses, etc.—and their lot was made as unbearable as possible in order to induce them to apologise and be released on an undertaking being given to Government. That was considered a great triumph for the gaol authorities.

Most of these gaol punishments fell to the lot of boys and young men, who resented coercion and humiliation. A fine and spirited lot of boys they were, full of self-respect and pep' and the spirit of adventure, the kind that in an English public school or university would have received every encouragement and praise. Here in India their youthful

idealism and pride led them to fetters and solitary confinement and whipping.

The lot of our womenfolk in prison was especially hard and painful to contemplate. They were mostly middle-class women, accustomed to a sheltered life, and suffering chiefly from the many repressions and customs produced by a society dominated to his own advantage, by man. The call of freedom had always a double meaning for them, and the enthusiasm and energy with which they threw themselves into the struggle had no doubt their springs in the vague and hardly conscious, but nevertheless intense, desire to rid themselves of domestic slavery also. Excepting a very few, they were classed as ordinary prisoners and placed with the most degraded of companions, and often under horrid conditions. I was once lodged in a barrack next to a female enclosure, a wall separating us. In that enclosure there were, besides other convicts, some women political prisoners, including one who had been my hostess and in whose house I had once stayed. A high wall separated us, but it did not prevent me from listening in horror to the language and curses which our friends had to put up with from the women convict warders.

It was very noticeable that the treatment of political prisoners in 1932 and 1933 was worse than it had been two years earlier, in 1930. This could not have been due merely to the whims of individual officers and the only reasonable inference seems to be that this was the deliberate policy of the Government. Even apart from political prisoners, the United Provinces Gaol Department had had the reputation in those years of being very much against anything that might savour of humanity. We had an interesting instance of this from an unimpeachable source. A distinguished gaol visitor, a gallant knight, not a rebel and a sedition-monger like us, but one whom the Government had delighted to honour, paid us a visit once in prison. He told us that some months earlier he had visited another gaol, and in his inspection note had described the gaoler as a "humane disciplinarian." The gaoler in question begged him not to say anything about his humanity, as this was at a discount in official circles. But the knight insisted, as he could not conceive that any harm would befall the gaoler because of his description. Result : soon after the gaoler was transferred to a

distant and out-of-the-way place, which was in the nature of a punishment to him.

Some gaolers, who were considered to be particularly fierce and unscrupulous, were promoted and given titles. Graft is such a universal phenomenon in gaols that hardly any one keeps clear of it. But my own experience, and that of many of my friends, has been that the worst offenders among the gaol staff are usually those who pose as strict disciplinarians.

I have been fortunate in gaol and outside, and almost every one I have come across has given me courtesy and consideration, even when perhaps I did not deserve them. One incident in gaol, however, caused me and my people much pain. My mother, Kamala and Indira, my daughter, had gone to interview my brother-in law, Ranjit Pandit, in the Allahabad District Gaol and, for no fault of theirs, they were insulted and hustled out by the gaoler. I was grieved when I learnt of this, and the reaction of the Provincial Government to it shocked me. To avoid the possibility of my mother being insulted by gaol officials, I decided to give up all interviews. For nearly seven months, while I was in Dehra Dun Gaol, I had no interview.

## V.

## PRISON HUMOURS

Two of us were transferred together from the Bareilly District Gaol to the Dehra Dun Gaol—Govind Ballabh Pant and I. To avoid the possibility of a demonstration, we were not put on the train at Bareilly, but at a wayside station fifty miles out. We were taken secretly by motor-car at night, and, after many months of seclusion, that drive through the cool night air was a rare delight.

Before we left Bareilly Goal, a little incident took place which moved me then and is yet fresh in my memory. The Superintendent of Police of Bareilly, an Englishman, was present there, and, as I got into the car, he handed to me rather shyly a packet which he told me contained old German illustrated magazines. He said that he had heard that I was learning German and so he had brought these magazines for me. I had never met him before, nor have I seen him since. I do not even know his name. This spontaneous act of courtesy and the kindly thought that prompted it touched me and I, felt very grateful to him.

During that long midnight drive I mused over the relations of Englishmen and Indians, of ruler and ruled, of official and non-official, of those in authority and those who have to obey. What a great gulf divided the two races, and how they distrusted and disliked each other. But more than the distrust and the dislike was the ignorance of each other, and, because of this, each side was a little afraid of the other and was constantly on its guard in the other's presence. To each, the other appeared as a sour-looking, unamiable creature, and neither realised that there was decency and kindness behind the mask. As the rulers of the land, with enormous patronage at their command, the English had attracted to themselves crowds of cringing place-hunters and opportunists and they judged of India from these unsavoury specimens. The Indian saw the Englishman function only as an official with all the inhumanity of the machine and with all the passion of a vested interest trying to preserve itself. How different was the behaviour of a person acting as an individual and obeying his own impulses from his behaviour as an official or a unit in an army.

The soldier, stiffening to attention, drops his humanity, and, acting as an automaton, shoots and kills inoffensive and harmless persons who have done him no ill. So also, I thought, the police officer who would hesitate to do an unkindness to an individual would, the day after, direct a *lathi* charge on innocent people. He would not think of himself as an individual then, nor will he consider as individuals those crowds whom he beats down or shoots.

As soon as one begins to think of the other side as a mass or a crowd, the human link seems to go. We forget that crowds also consist of individuals, of men and women and children, who love and hate and suffer. An average Englishman, if he was frank, would probably confess that he knows some quite decent Indians, but they are exceptions, and as a whole Indians are a detestable crowd. The average Indian would admit that some Englishmen whom he knows were admirable, but, apart from these few, the English were an overbearing, brutal, and thoroughly bad lot. Curious how each person judges of the other race, not from the individual with whom he has come in contact, but from others about

whom he knows very little or nothing at all.

Personally, I have been very fortunate and, almost invariably, I have received courtesy from my own countrymen as well as from the English. Even my gaolers and the policemen, who have arrested me or escorted me as a prisoner from place to place, have been kind to me, and much of the bitterness of conflict and the sting of gaol life has been toned down because of this human touch. It was not surprising that my own countrymen should treat me so, for I had gained a measure of notoriety and popularity among them. Even for Englishmen I was an individual and not merely one of the mass, and, I imagine, the fact that I had received my education in England, and especially my having been to an English public school, brought me nearer to them. Because of this, they could not help considering me as more or less civilised after their own pattern, however perverted my public activities appeared to be. Often I felt a little embarrassed and humiliated because of this special treatment when I compared my lot with that of most of my colleagues.

Despite all these advantages that I had, gaol was gaol, and the oppressive atmosphere of the place was sometimes almost unbearable. The very air of it was full of, violence and meanness and graft and untruth ; there was either cringing or cursing. A person who was at all sensitive was in a continuous state of tension. Trivial occurrences would upset one. A piece of bad news in a letter, some item in the newspaper, would make one almost ill with anxiety or anger for a while. Outside there was always relief in action, and various interests and activities produced an equilibrium of the mind and body.. In prison there was no outlet and one felt bottled up and repressed, and, inevitably, one took one-sided and rather distorted views of happenings. Illness in gaol was particularly distressing.

And yet I managed to accustom myself to the gaol routine, and with physical exercise and fairly hard mental work kept fit. Whatever the value of work and exercise might be outside, they are essential in gaol, for without them one is apt to go to pieces. I adhered to a strict time-table and, in order to keep up to the mark I

carried on with as many normal habits as I could, such as the daily shave (I was allowed a safety razor). I mention this minor matter because, as a rule, people gave it up and slacked in other ways. After a hard day's work, the evening found me pleasantly tired and sleep was welcomed.

And so the days passed, and the weeks and the months. But sometimes a month would stick terribly and would not end, or so it seemed. And sometimes I would feel bored and fed up and angry with almost everything and everybody—with my companions in prison, with the gaol staff, with people outside for something they had done or not done with the British Empire (but this was a permanent feeling), and above all with myself. I would become a bundle of nerves, very susceptible to various humours caused by gaol life. Fortunately I recovered soon from these humours.

Interview days were the red-letter days in gaol. How one longed for them and waited for them and counted the days! And after the excitement of the interview there was the inevitable reaction and a sense of emptiness and loneliness. If, as sometimes happened, the interview

was not a success, because of some bad news which upset me, or some other reason, I would feel miserable afterwards. There were gaol officials present of course at the interviews, but two or three times at Bareilly there was in addition a C. I. D. man present with paper and pencil, eagerly taking down almost every word of the conversation. I found this exceedingly irritating, and these interviews were complete failures.

And then I gave up these precious interviews because of the treatment my mother and wife had received in the course of an interview in the Allahabad Gaol and afterwards from the Government. For nearly seven months I had no interview. It was a dreary time for me, and when at the end of that period I decided to resume interviews and my people came to see me, I was almost intoxicated with the joy of it. My sister's little children also came to see me, and when a tiny one wanted to mount on my shoulder, as she used to do, it was more than my emotions could stand. That touch of home life, after the long yearning for human contacts, upset me.

When interviews stopped, the fortnightly

letters from home or from some other gaol (for both my sisters were in prison) became all the more precious and eagerly expected. If the letter did not come on the appointed day I was worried. And yet when it did come, I almost hesitated to open it. I played about with it as one does with an assured pleasure, and at the back of my mind there was also a trace of fear lest the letter contain any news or reference which might annoy me. Letter writing and receiving in gaol were always serious incursions on a peaceful and unruffled existence. They produced an emotional state which was disturbing, and for a day or two afterwards one's mind wandered and it was difficult to concentrate on the day's work.

In Natni Prison and Bareilly Gaol I had several companions. In Dehra Dun there were three of us to begin with—Govind Ballabh Pant, Kunwar Anand Singh of Kashipur and I—but Pantji was discharged after a couple of months on the expiry of his six months. Two others joined us later. By the beginning of January 1933 all my companions had left me and I was alone. For nearly eight months, till my discharge at the end of August, I lived a solitary life in Dehra Dun

Gaol with hardly any one to talk to, except some member of the gaol staff for a few minutes daily. This was not technically solitary confinement, but it was a near approach to it, and it was a dreary period for me. Fortunately I had resumed my interviews, and they brought some relief. As a special favour, I suppose, I was allowed to receive fresh flowers from outside and to keep a few photographs, and they cheered me greatly. Ordinarily, flowers and photographs are not permitted, and on several occasions I have not been allowed to receive the flowers that had been sent for me. Attempts to brighten up the cells were not encouraged, and I remember a superintendent of a gaol once objecting to the manner in which a companion of mine, whose cell was next to mine, had arranged his toilet articles. He was told that he must not make his cell look attractive and "luxurious". The articles of luxury were : a tooth brush, tooth paste, fountainpen ink, a bottle of hair oil, a brush and comb, and perhaps one or two other little things.

One begins to appreciate the value of the little things of life in prison. One's belongings are so few and they cannot easily

be added to or replaced, and one clings to them and gathers up odd bits of things which in the world outside, would go to the waste-paper basket. The property sense does not leave one even when there is nothing worth while to own and keep.

Sometimes a physical longing would come for the soft things of life—bodily comfort, pleasant surroundings, the company of friends, interesting conversation, games with children . . . . A picture or a paragraph in a newspaper would bring the old days vividly before one, carefree days of youth, and a nostalgia would seize one, and the day would be passed in restlessness.

I used to spin a little daily, for I found some manual occupation soothing and a relief from too much intellectual work. My main occupation, however, was reading and writing. I could not have all the books I wanted, as there were restrictions and a censorship, and the censors were not always very competent for the job. Spengler's *Decline of the West* was held up because the title looked dangerous and seditious. But I must not complain, for I had, on the whole, a goodly variety of books. Again I seem to have been a favoured person, and many of

my colleagues (A Class prisoners) had the greatest difficulty in getting books on current topics. In Benares Gaol, I was told, even the official White Paper, containing the British Government's constitutional proposals, was not allowed in, as it dealt with political matters. The only books that British officials heartily recommended were religious books or novels. It is wonderful how dear to the heart of the British Government is the subject of religion and how impartially it encourages all brands of it.

When the most ordinary civil liberties have been curtailed in India, it is hardly pertinent to talk of a prisoner's rights. And yet the subject is worthy of consideration. If a court of law sentences a person to imprisonment, does it follow that not only his body, but also his mind should be incarcerated? Why should not the minds of prisoners be free even though their bodies are not? Those in charge of the prison administrations in India will no doubt be horrified at such a question, for their capacity for new ideas and sustained thought is usually limited. Censorship is bad enough at any time and is partisan and stupid. In India it deprives us of a great deal of

modern literature and advanced journals and newspapers. The list of proscribed books is extensive and is frequently added to. To add to all this, the prisoner has to suffer a second and a separate censorship, and thus many books and newspapers that can be legally purchased and read outside the prison may not reach him.

Some time ago this question arose in the United States, in the famous Sing Sing Prison of New York, where some Communist newspapers had been banned. The feeling against Communists is very strong among the ruling classes in America, but in spite of this the prison authorities agreed that inmates of the prison could receive any publication which they desired, including Communist newspapers and magazines. The sole exception made by the Warden was in the case of cartoons which he regarded as inflammatory.

It is a little absurd to discuss this question of freedom of mind in prison in India when, as it happens, the vast majority of the prisoners are not allowed any newspapers or writing materials. It is not a question of censorship but of total denial. Only A class (or in Bengal, Division I) prisoners are

allowed writing materials as a matter of course, and not even all these are allowed daily newspapers. The daily newspaper allowed is of the Government's choice. B and C Class prisoners, politicals and non-politicals, are not supposed to have writing materials. The former may sometimes get them as a very special privilege, which is frequently withdrawn. Probably the proportion of A Class prisoners to the others is one to a thousand, and they might well be excluded in considering the lot of prisoners in India. But it is well to remember that even these favoured A Class convicts have far less privileges in regard to books and newspapers than the ordinary prisoners in most civilised countries.

For the rest, the 999 in every thousand, two or three books are permitted at a time, but conditions are such that they cannot always take advantage of this privilege. Writing or the taking of notes of books read are dangerous pastimes in which they must not indulge. This deliberate discouragement of intellectual development is curious and revealing. From the point of view of reclaiming a prisoner and of making him a fit citizen, his mind should be approached and

diverted, and he should be made literate and taught some craft. But this point of view has perhaps not struck the prison authorities in India. Certainly it has been conspicuous by its absence in the United Provinces. Recently attempts have been made to teach reading and writing to the boys and young men in prison, but they are wholly ineffective, and the men in charge of them have no competence. Sometimes it is said that convicts are averse to learning. My own experience has been the exact opposite, and I found many of them, who came to me for the purpose, to have a perfect passion for learning to read and write. We used to teach such convicts as came our way, and they worked hard; and sometimes when I woke up in the middle of the night I was surprised to find one or two of them sitting by a dim lantern inside their barrack, learning their lessons for the next day.

So I occupied myself with my books, going from one type of reading to another, but usually sticking to 'heavy' books. Novels made one feel mentally slack, and I did not read many of them. Sometimes I would weary of too much reading, and then I would take to writing. My historical series of letters

to my daughter kept me occupied right through my two-year term, and they helped me very greatly to keep mentally fit. To some extent I lived through the past I was writing about and almost forgot about my gaol surroundings.

Travel books were always welcome—records of old travellers, Hiuen Tsang, and Marco Polo, and Ibn Battuta and others, and moderns like Sven Hedin, with his journeys across the deserts of Central Asia, and Roerich, finding strange adventures in Tibet. Picture books also, especially of mountains and glaciers and deserts, for in prison one hungers for wide spaces and seas and mountains. I had some beautiful picture books of Mont Blanc, the Alps, and the Himalayas, and I turned to them often and gazed at the glaciers when the temperature of my cell or barrack was 115°F. or even more. An Atlas was an exciting affair. It brought all manner of past memories and dreams of places we had visited and places we had wanted to go to. And the longing to go again to those haunts of past days, and visit all the other inviting marks and dots that represented great cities, and cross the shaded regions that were mountains, and the blue patches

that were seas, and to see the beauties of the world, and watch the struggles and conflicts of a changing humanity—the longing to do all this would seize us and clutch us by the throat, and we would hurriedly and sorrowfully put the atlas by, and return to the well known walls that surrounded us and the dull routine that was our daily lot.

## VI

### ALIPORE GAOL

Already how am I so far  
Out of that minute? Must I go  
Still like the thistle-ball, no bar,  
Onward wherever light winds blow  
Fixed by no friendly star ?

*Robert Browning*

That very night I was taken to Calcutta. From Howrah station a huge black Maria carried me to Lal Bazaar Police Station. I had read much of this famous headquarters of the Calcutta police and I looked round with interest. There were large numbers of European sergeants and inspectors to be seen, far more than would have been in evidence in any police headquarters in Northern India. The constables seemed to be almost all from Behar or the eastern districts of the U. P. During the many journeys I made in the big prison lorry, to court and back; or from one prison to another, a number of these constables used to accompany me inside. They looked thoroughly unhappy, disliking their job, and obviously full of sympathy for me. Sometimes their eyes

glistened with tears.

I was kept in the Presidency Gaol to begin with, and from there I was taken for my trial to the Chief Presidency Magistrate's court. This was a novel experience. The court-room and building had more the appearance of a besieged fortress than of an open court. Except for a few newspaper men and the usual lawyers, no outsiders were allowed anywhere in the neighbourhood. The police was present in some force. These arrangements apparently had not been made especially for me; that was the daily routine. When I was taken to the court-room I had to march through a long passage (inside the room) which was closely wired on top and at the side. It was like going through a cage. The dock was far from the magistrate's seat. The court-room was crowded with policemen and black-coated and gowned lawyers.

I was used enough to court trials. Many of my previous trials had taken place in gaol precincts. But there had always been some friends, relatives, familiar faces about, and the whole atmosphere had been a little easier. The police had usually kept in the back ground and there had never been any

cage-like structures about. Here it was very different, and I gazed at strange, unfamiliar faces between whom and me there was nothing in common. It was not an attractive crowd. I am afraid gowned lawyers *en masse* are not beautiful to look at, and police-court lawyers seem to develop a peculiarly unlovely look. At last I managed to spot one familiar lawyer's face in that black array, but he was lost in that crowd.

I felt very lonely and isolated even when I sat on the balcony outside before the trial began. My pulse must have quickened a little, and inwardly I was not quite so composed as I usually had been during my previous trials. It struck me then that if even I, with so much experience of trials and convictions, could react abnormally to that situation, how much more must young and inexperienced people feel the tension?

I felt much better in the dock itself. There was, as usual, no defence offered, and I read out a brief statement. The next day, February 16th, I was sentenced to two years. My seventh term of imprisonment had begun.

I looked back with some satisfaction to my five and a half months' stay outside. That time had been fairly well occupied, and

had managed to get through some useful jobs. My mother had turned the corner and was out of immediate danger. My younger sister, Krishna, had married. My daughter's future education had been fixed up. I had straightened out some of my domestic and financial tangles. Many personal matters that I had been long neglecting had been attended to. In the field of public affairs I knew that no one could do much then. I had at least helped a little in stiffening up the Congress attitude and in directing it to some extent towards social and economic ways of thinking. My Poona correspondence with Gandhiji, and later my articles in the Press, had made a difference. My articles on the communal question had also done some good. And then I had met Gandhiji again after more than two years, and many other friends and comrades, and had charged myself with nervous and emotional energy for another period.

One shadow remained to darken my mind—Kamala's ill health. I had no notion then how very ill she was, for she has a habit of carrying on till she collapses. But I was worried. And yet I hoped that now I was in prison she would be free to devote

herself to her treatment. It was more difficult to do so whilst I was out and she was not willing to leave me for long.

I had one other regret. I was sorry that I had not visited even once the rural areas of Allahabad district. Many of my young colleagues had recently been arrested there for carrying out our instructions, and it seemed almost like disloyalty to them not to follow them in the district.

Again the black Maria carried me back to prison. On our way we passed plenty of troops on the march with machine-guns, armoured cars, etc. I peeped at them through the tiny openings of our prison van. How ugly an armoured car is, I thought, and a tank. They reminded me of prehistoric monsters—the dinosaurs and the like.

I was transferred from the Presidency Gaol to the Alipore Central Gaol, and there I was given a little cell, about ten feet by nine. In front of it was a veranda and a small open yard. The wall enclosing the yard was a low one, about seven feet, and looking over it a strange sight confronted me. All manner of odd buildings—single storey, double storey, round, rectangular,

curious roofings—rose all round, some over-topping the others. It seemed that the structures had grown one by one, being fitted in anyhow to take advantage of all the available space. Almost it looked like a jigsaw puzzle or a futurist attempt at the fantastic. And yet I was told that all the buildings had been arranged very methodically with a tower in the centre (which was a church for the Christian prisoners) and radiating lines. Being a city gaol, the area was limited and every little bit of it had to be utilised.

I had hardly recovered from my first view of the seemingly fantastic structures around me when a terrifying sight greeted me. Two chimneys, right in front of my cell and yard, were belching forth dense volumes of black smoke, and sometimes the wind blew this smoke in my direction, almost suffocating me. They were the chimneys of the gaol kitchens. I suggested to the Superintendent later that gas-masks might be provided to meet this offensive.

It was not an agreeable start, and the future was not inviting—to enjoy the unchanging prospect of the red-brick structures of Alipore Gaol and to swallow

and inhale the smoke of its kitchen chimneys. There were no trees or greenery in my yard. It was all paved and *pucca* and clean, except for the daily deposit of smoke, but it was also bare and cheerless. I could just see the tops of one or two trees in adjoining yards. They were barren of leaf or flower when I arrived. But gradually a mysterious change came over them and little bits of green were peeping out all over their branches. The leaves were coming out of the buds; they grew rapidly and covered the nakedness of the branches with their pleasant green. It was a delightful change which made even Alipore Gaol look gay and cheerful.

In one of these trees was a kite's nest which interested me, and I watched it often. The little ones were growing and learning the tricks of the trade, and sometimes they would swoop down with rapidity and amazing accuracy and snatch the bread out of a prisoner's hand, almost out of his mouth.

From sunset to sunrise (more or less) we were locked up in our cell, and the long winter evenings were not very easy to pass. I grew tired of reading or writing hour after hour, and would start walking up and down.

that little cell—four or five short steps forward and then back again. I remembered the bears at the zoo tramping up and down their cages. Sometimes when I felt particularly bored I took to my favourite remedy, the *shirshasana*—standing on the head!

The early part of the night was fairly quiet, and city sounds used to float in—the noise of the trams, a gramophone, or some one singing in the distance. It was pleasant to hear this faint and distant music. But there was not much peace at night, for the guards on duty tramped up and down, and every hour there was some kind of an inspection. Some officer came round with a lantern to make sure that none of us had escaped. At 3 a. m. every day, or rather night, there was a tremendous din, and a mighty sound of scraping and scrubbing. The kitchens had begun functioning.

There were vast numbers of warders and guards and officers and clerks in the Alipore Gaol, as also in the Presidency. Both these prisons housed a population about equal to that of Naini Prison—2200 to 2300—but the staff in each must have been more than double that of Naini. There were many

European warders and retired Indian Army officers. It was evident that the British Empire functioned more intensively and more expensively in Calcutta than in the U. P. A sign and a perpetual reminder of the might of the Empire was the cry that prisoners had to shout out when high officials approached them. "*Sarkar Salaam*" was the cry, lengthened out, and it was accompanied by certain physical movements of the body. The voices of the prisoners shouting out this cry came to me many times a day over my yard wall, and especially when the Superintendent passed by daily. I could just see over my seven-foot wall the top of the huge State umbrella under which the Superintendent marched.

Was this extraordinary cry—*sarkar salaam*—and the movements that went with it relics of old times, I wondered ; or were they the invention of some inspired English official ? I do not know, but I imagine that it was an English invention. It has a typical Anglo-Indian sound about it. Fortunately this cry does not prevail in the U.P. gaols or probably in any other province besides Bengal and Assam. The way this enforced salutation to the might of the *sarkar* is shouted out

seemed to me very degrading.

One change for the better I noticed with pleasure in Alipore. The food of the ordinary prisoners was far superior to the U. P. prison food. In regard to gaol diet the U. P. compares unfavourably with many provinces.

The brief winter was soon over, and spring raced by and summer began. It grew hotter day by day. I had never been fond of the Calcutta climate, and even a few days of it had made me stale and flat. In prison conditions were naturally far worse, and I did not prosper as the days went by. Lack of space for exercise and long lock-up hours in that climate probably affected my health a little and I lost weight rapidly. How I began to hate all locks and bolts and bars and walls !

After a month in Alipore I was allowed to take some exercise outside my yard. This was an agreeable change and I could walk up and down under the main wall, morning and evening. Gradually I got accustomed to Alipore Gaol and the Calcutta climate; and even the kitchen, with its smoke and mighty din, became a tolerable nuisance. Other matters occupied my mind, other worries filled me. News from outside was not good.

## VII

### DEHRA GAOL AGAIN

I was not flourishing in Alipore Gaol. My weight had gone down considerably, and the Calcutta air and increasing heat were distressing me. There were rumours of my transfer to a better climate. On May 7th I was told to gather my belongings and to march out of the gaol. I was being sent to Dehra Dun Gaol. The drive through Calcutta in the cool evening air was very pleasant after some months of seclusion, and the crowds at the big Howrah station were fascinating.

I was glad of my transfer, and looked forward to Dehra Dun with its near-by mountains. On arrival I found that all was not as it used to be nine months earlier, when I had left it for Naini. I was put in a new place, an old cattle-shed cleaned up and fitted out.

As a cell it was not bad, and there was a little veranda attached to it. There was also a small yard adjoining, about fifty feet in length. The cell was better than the ancient one I had had previously in Dehra, but soon

I discovered that other changes were not for the better. The surrounding wall, which had been ten feet high, had just been raised, especially for my benefit, by another four or five feet. The view of the hills I had so looked forward to was completely cut off and I could just see a few tree-tops. I was in this gaol for over three months, and I never had even a glimpse of the mountains. I was not allowed to walk outside in front of the gaol gate, as I used to, and my little yard was considered quite big enough for exercise.

These and other new restrictions were disappointing, and I felt irritated. I grew listless and disinclined to take even the little exercise that my yard allowed. I had hardly ever felt quite so lonely and cut off from the world. The solitary confinement began to tell on my nerves, and physically and mentally I declined. On the other side of the wall, only a few feet away, I knew there was freshness and fragrance, the cool smell of grass and soft earth, and distant vistas. But they were all out of reach and my eyes grew weary and heavy, faced always by those walls. There was not even the usual movement of prison life, for I was kept apart and by myself.

After six weeks the monsoon broke and it rained in torrents : we had twelve inches of rain during the first week. There was a change in the air and whisperings of new life: the temperature came down and the body felt relaxed and relieved. But there was no relief for the eyes or the mind. Sometimes the iron door of my yard would open to allow a warder to come in or go out, and for a few seconds I had a sudden glimpse of the outside world—green fields and trees, bright with colour and glistening with pearly droops of rain—for a moment only, and then it all vanished like a flash of lightning. The door was hardly ever fully opened. Apparently the warders had instructions not to open it if I was anywhere near, and even when they opened it, to do so just a little. These brief glimpses of greenery and freshness were hardly welcome to me. That sight produced in me a kind of nostalgia, a heartache, and I would even avoid looking out when the door opened.

But all this unhappiness was not really the fault of the gaol, though it contributed to it. It was the reaction of outside events—Kamla's illness and my political worries. I was beginning to realise that Kamala was

again in the grip of her old disease, and I felt helpless and unable to be of any service to her. I knew that my presence by her side would have made a difference.

Unlike Alipore, Dehra Dun gaol allowed me a daily newspaper, and I could keep in touch with political and other developments outside. In Patna the All-India Congress Committee met after nearly three years (for most of this time it was unlawful), and its proceedings were depressing. It surprised me that no attempt was made at this first meeting, after so much that had happened in India and the world; to analyse the situation, to have full discussions, to try to get out of old ruts. Gandhiji seemed to be, from a distance, his old dictatorial self—"If you choose to follow my lead you have to accept my conditions," he said. His demand was perfectly natural for one could not both have him and ask him to act against his own deeply-felt convictions. But there seemed too much of imposition from above and too little of mutual discussion and hammering out a policy. It is curious how Gandhiji dominates the mind and then complains of the helplessness of people. Few people, I suppose, have had more loyal devotion and obedience on

the mass-scale than he has had, and it seems hardly fair to blame the masses for not coming up to the high standard he had set for them. At the Patna meeting he did not even stay till the end, as he had to continue his Harijan tour. He told the A. I. C. C. to be business-like and to adopt the resolutions placed before them by the Working Committee with speed, and then he went away.

It is probably true that prolonged discussions would not have improved matters. There was a confusion and want of clarity among the members, and though many were prepared to criticise, there were hardly any constructive suggestions. Under the circumstances this was natural, for the burden of the struggle had largely fallen on these leaders from various provinces and they were a little tired and mentally not fresh. Dimly it was felt that they had to cry halt, civil disobedience had to be stopped : but what then ? Two groups took shape: one desiring purely constitutional activities through legislature, the other thinking rather vaguely along socialistic lines. The majority of the members belonged to neither of these groups. They disliked a reversion to

constitutionalism, and at the same time socialism frightened them a little and seemed to them to introduce an element which might split their ranks. They had no constructive ideas, and the one hope and sheet-anchor they possessed was Gandhiji. As of old, they turned to him and followed his lead, even though many of them did not wholly approve of what he said. Gandhiji's support of the moderate constitutional elements gave them dominance in the Committee and the Congress.

All this was to be expected. But the reaction took the Congress further back than I had thought. At no time during the last fifteen years, ever since the advent of non-co-operation, had Congress leaders talked in this ultra-constitutional fashion. Even the Swaraj Party of the middle twenties, which itself was the result of a reaction, was far in advance of the new leadership, and there were no such commanding personalities now as the Swaraj Party had. Many persons who had studiously kept aloof from the movement so long as it was risky to join it, now streamed in and assumed importance.

The proscription of the Congress was ended by the Government and it became a

legal organisatin. But many of its associated and subsidiary bodies continued to be illegal, such as its volunteer department, the Seva Dal, as also a number of Kisan Sabhas, which were semi-independent peasant unions, and several educational institutions and youth leagues, including a children's organisation. In particulsr the 'Khudai Khidmatgars', or the Frontier Redshirts, as they are called, were still outlawed. This organisation had become a regular part of the Congress in 1931, and represented it in the Frontier Provinces. Thus, although the Congress had completely drawn off the direct action part of the struggle and had reverted to constitutional ways, the Government kept all the special laws meant for civil disobedience and even continued the proscription of important parts of the Congress organisation. Special attention was also paid to the suppression of peasant organisations and labour unions, while, it was interesting to note, high Government officials went about urging the zamindars and landlords to organise themselves. Every facility was offered to these landlord's organisations. The two major ones in the United Province have their subscriptions:

collected by official agency, together with the revenue or taxes.

I am afraid I have never been partial to the Hindu or Moslem communal organisations but an incident made me feel particularly bitter towards the Hindu Mahasabha. One of its secretaries actually went out of the way to approve of the continuation of the ban on the "Redshirts", and to pat Government on the back for it. This approval of the deprivation of the most elementary of civil rights, at a time when there was no aggressive movement on, amazed me. Apart from this question of principle, it was well known that these Frontier people had behaved wonderfully during these years of struggle; and their leader, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, one of the bravest and straightest men in India, was still in prison—a State prisoner kept confined without any trial. It seemed to me that communal bias could hardly go further, and I expected that more prominent leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha would hasten to disown their colleague on this matter. But, so far as I could discover, not a single one of them said a word about it.

I was much upset by this Hindu Sabha secretary's statement. It was bad enough in

itself, but to my mind it appeared as a symbol of the new state of affairs in the country. In the heat of that summer afternoon I dozed off, and I remember having a curious dream. Abdul Ghaffar Khan was being attacked on all sides and I was fighting to defend him. I woke up in an exhausted state, feeling very miserable, and my pillow was wet with tears. This surprised me, for in my waking state I was not liable to such emotional outbursts.

My nerves were obviously in a bad w in those days. My sleep became troubled and disturbed, which was very unusual for me, and all manner of nightmares came to me. Sometimes I would shout out in my sleep. Once evidently the shouting had been more vigorous than usual, and I woke up with a start to find two gaol warders standing near my bed, rather worried at my noises. I had dreamed that I was being strangled.

About this time a resolution of the Congress Working Committee had also a painful effect on me. This resolution was passed, "in view of the loose talk about the confiscation of private property and necessity of class war" and it proceeded to remind Congressmen that the Karachi Resolution "neither contemplates

confiscation of private property without just cause or compensation, nor advocacy of class war. The Working Committee is further of the opinion that confiscation and class war are contrary to the Congress creed of non-violence". The resolution was loosely worded and exhibited a certain amount of ignorance on the part of the framers as to what class war was. It was obviously aimed at the newly formed Congress Socialist Party. There had, as a matter of fact, been no talk of confiscation on the part of any responsible member of this group ; there had, however, been frequent reference to the existence of class war under present conditions. The Working Committee's resolution seemed to hint that any person believing in the existence of this class conflict could not even be an ordinary member of the Congress. Nobody had ever accused the Congress of having turned Socialist or of being against private property. Some members of it held those opinions, but now it appeared that they had no place even in the rank and file of this all embracing national organisation.

It had often been stated that the Congress represented the nation, including every group and interest in it, from prince to

pauper. National movements frequently make that claim, meaning thereby presumably that they represent the great majority of the nation and that their policy is for the good of all interests. But the claim is on the face of it untenable, for no political organisation can represent conflicting interests without reducing itself to a flabby and unmeaning mass with no distinctive and distinguishing features. The Congress is either a political party with a definite (or vague) aim and philosophy of achieving political power and of utilising it for the national good, or it is just a benevolent and humanitarian organisation with no views of its own and wishing well to everybody. It can represent only those who are in general agreement with that aim and philosophy, and those who oppose this are likely to be considered by it as anti-national or anti-social and reactionary elements whose influence must be checked or eliminated, in order to give effect to its own philosophy. It is true that a national anti-imperialist movement offers a wide basis for agreement, as it does not touch the social conflicts. And so the Congress did represent in varying degrees the vast majority of the people of India, and it drew within its fold all manner

of mutually differing groups who agreed only on the anti-imperialist issue, and even in regard to this there were great differences in stress. Those who, on this basic issue of anti-imperialism held a contrary opinion kept out of the Congress and sided, also in varying degrees, with the British Government. The Congress thus became a kind of permanent All-Parties Congress, consisting of large numbers of groups shading into each other and held together by one common faith and the dominating personality of Gandhiji.

The Working Committee subsequently tried to explain its resolution on class war. The importance of that resolution lay not so much in its language or what it definitely laid down, as in the fact that it was yet another indication of the way Congress was going. The resolution had obviously been inspired by the new parliamentary wing of the Congress aiming at gaining the support of men of property in the coming election to the Legislative Assembly. At their instance the Congress was looking more and more to the Right and trying to win over the moderate and conservative elements in the country. Soothing words were being addressed even

to those who had been hostile to the Congress movements in the past and had sided with the Government during the continuance of civil disobedience. A clamorous and critical Left wing was felt to be a handicap in this process of conciliation and 'conversion', and the Working Committee's resolution, as well as many other individual utterances, made it clear that the Congress Executive were not going to be moved from their new path by this nibbling from the Left. If the Left did not behave it would be sat upon and eliminated from the Congress ranks. The manifesto issued by the Parliamentary Board of the Congress contained a programme which was far more cautious and moderate than any that the Congress had sponsored during the past fifteen years.

The Congress leadership, quite apart even from Gandhiji, consisted of many well-known persons with bright records in the national struggle for freedom, men honoured throughout the country for their integrity and fearlessness. But the new orientation of policy brought into the second ranks, and even the front rank, of Congress many individuals who could hardly be described as idealists. In the Congress ranks there were

of course, large numbers of idealists, but the door for careerists and opportunists was now more open than it had ever been before. Apart from Gandhiji's enigmatical and elusive personality, which dominated the scene, the Congress seemed to possess two faces : a purely political side was developing like a caucus, and the other aspect was that of a prayer meeting, full of pietism and sentimentality.

On the Government side there was an air of triumph, in no way concealed, at what they considered the success of their policy in suppressing civil disobedience and its off-shoots. The operation had been successful, and for the moment it mattered little whether the patient lived or died. They proposed to continue the same policy, with minor variations even though the Congress had been for the moment brought round to some extent. They knew that such changes in national policy could only be temporary so long as the basic problem remained, and any relaxation on their part might lead to a more rapid growth than otherwise. Perhaps they also thought that in continuing to suppress the more advanced elements in the Congress or in the labour and peasant ranks, they would not

greatly offend the more cautious leaders of the Congress.

To some extent my thoughts in Dehra Dun Gaol ran along these channels. I was really not in a position to form definite opinions about the course of events, for I was out of touch. In Alipore I had been almost completely out of touch, in Dehra a newspaper of the Government's choice brought me partial and sometimes one-sided news. It is quite possible that contacts with my colleagues outside and a closer study of the situation would have resulted in my varying my opinions in some degree.

Distressed with the present, I began thinking of the past, of what had happened politically in India since I began to take some part in public affairs. How far had we been right in what we had done ? How far wrong ? It struck me that my thinking would be more orderly and helpful if I put it down on paper. This would also help in engaging my mind in a definite task and so diverting it from worry and depression. So in the month of June 1934, I began my 'autobiographical narrative' in Dehra Gaol, and for the last eight months I have continued it when the mood to do so has seized me. Often there have

been intervals when I felt no desire to write ; three of these gaps were each of them nearly a month long. But I managed to continue, and now I am nearing the end of this personal journey. Most of this has been written under peculiarly distressing circumstances when I was suffering from depression and emotional strain. Perhaps some of this is reflected in what I have written, but this very writing helped me greatly to pull myself out of the present with all its worries. As I wrote, I was hardly thinking of an outside audience; I was addressing myself framing questions and answering them for my own benefit, sometimes even drawing some amusement from it. I wanted as far as possible to think straight, and I imagined that this review of the past might help me to do so.

Towards the end of July, Kamala's condition rapidly deteriorated and within a few days became critical. On August 11th I was suddenly asked to leave Dehra Gaol, and that night I was sent under police escort to Allahabad. The next evening we reached Prayag station in Allahabad {and there I was informed by the District Magistrate that I was being released temporarily so that I might visit my ailing wife. It was six months to a day from the time of my arrest.

## VI

### BACK TO PRISON.

Shadow is itself unrestrained in its path while sunshine, as an incident of its very nature, is pursued a hundredfold by nuance. Thus is sorrow from happiness a thing apart ; the scope of happiness, however, is hampered by the aches and hurts of endless sorrows

*Rajatarangini.*<sup>1</sup>

I was back again in Naini Prison, and I felt as if I was starting a fresh term of imprisonment. In and out, out and in ; what a shuttlecock I had become ! This switching on and off shook up the whole system emotionally and it was not easy to adjust oneself to repeated changes. I had expected to be put in my old cell at Naini to which a previous long stay had accustomed me. There were some flowers there, originally planted by my brother in-law, Ranjit Pandit, and a good veranda. But this old Barrack No. 6 was occupied by a detenu, a State prisoner, kept confined without trial or conviction. It was not considered desirable for me to associate with him, and I was

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<sup>1</sup>R. S. Pandit's translation. ("River of Kings" *Taranga*. viii verse. 1913.)

therefore placed in another part of the gaol which was much more closed in and was devoid of flowers or greenery.

But the place where I spent my days and nights mattered little, for my mind was elsewhere. I feared that the little improvement that had taken place in Kamala's condition would not stand the shock of my re-arrest. And so it happened. For some days it was arranged to supply me in prison with a very brief doctor's bulletin daily. This came by a devious route. The doctor had to telephone it to the police headquarters and the latter then sent it on to the prison. It was not considered desirable to have any direct contacts between the doctors and the gaol staff. For two weeks these bulletins came to me, sometimes rather irregularly, and then they were stopped although there was a progressive deterioration in Kamala's condition.

Bad news and the waiting for news made the days intolerably long and the nights were sometimes worse. Time seemed almost to stand still or to move with desperate slowness, and every hour was a burden and a horror. I had never before had this feeling in this acute degree. I thought then

that I was likely to be released within two months or so, after the Bombay Congress Session, but those two months seemed an eternity.

Exactly a month after my re-arrest a police officer took me from prison on a brief visit to my wife. I was told that I would be allowed to visit her in this way twice a week, and even the time for it was fixed. I waited on the fourth day—no one came for me ; and on the fifth, sixth, seventh. I became weary of waiting. News reached me that her condition was becoming critical again. What a joke it was, I thought, to tell me that I would be taken to see her twice a week.

At last the month of September was over. They were the longest and most damnable thirty days that I had ever experienced.

Suggestions were made to me through various intermediaries that if I could give an assurance, even an informal assurance, to keep away from politics for the rest of my term I would be released to attend on Kamala. Politics were far enough from my thoughts just then, and the politics I had seen during my eleven days outside had disgusted me, but to give an assurance ! And to be disloyal to my pledges, to the

cause, to my colleagues, to myself! It was an impossible condition, whatever happened. To do so meant inflicting a mortal injury on the roots of my being, on almost everything I held sacred. I was told that Kamala's condition was becoming worse and worse and my presence by her side might make all the difference between life and death. Was my personal conceit and pride greater than my desire to give her this chance? It might have been a terrible predicament for me, but fortunately that dilemma did not face me 'in that way at least. I knew that Kamla herself would strongly disapprove of my giving any undertaking, and if I did anything of the kind it would shock her and harm her.

Early in October I was taken to see her again. She was lying almost in a daze with a high temperature. She longed to have me by her, but as I was leaving her, to go back to prison, she smiled at me bravely and beckoned to me to bend down. When I did so, she whispered: "What is this about your giving an assurance to Government? Do not give it!"

During the eleven days I was out of prison it had been decided to send Kamala,

as soon as she was a little better, to a more suitable place for treatment. Ever since then we had waited for her to get better, but instead she had gone downhill, and now six weeks latter, the change for the worse was very marked. It was futile to continue waiting and watching this process of deterioration, and it was decided to send her to Bhowali in the hills even in her present condition.

The day before she was to leave for Bhowali I was taken from prison to bid her good-bye. When will I see her again? I wondered. And will I see her at all? But she looked bright and cheerful that day, and I felt happier than I had done for long.

Nearly three weeks later I was transferred from Naini Prison to Almora District Gaol so as to be nearer to Kamala. Bhowali was on the way, and my police escort and I spent a few hours there. I was greatly pleased to note the improvement in Kamala, and I left her, to continue my journey to Almora, with a light heart. Indeed, even before I had reached her, the mountains had filled me with joy.

I was glad to be back in these mountains, and as our car sped along the winding road

the cold morning air and the unfolding panorama brought a sense of exhilaration. Higher and higher we went : the gorges deepened : the peaks lost themselves in the clouds : the vegetation changed till the firs and pines covered the hill-sides. A turn of the road would bring to our eyes suddenly a new expanse of hills and valleys with a little river gurgling in the depths below I could not have my fill of the sight and I looked on hungrily, storing my memory with it, so that I might revive it in my mind when actual sight was denied.

Clusters of little mountain huts clung to the hill-sides, and round about them were tiny fields made by prodigious labour on every possible bit of slope. They looked like terraces from a distance, huge steps which sometimes went from the valley below right up almost to the mountain top. What enormous labour had gone to make nature yield a little food to the sparse population ! How they toiled unceasingly only to get barely enough for their needs ! Those ploughed terraces gave a domesticated look to the hillsides and they contrasted strangely with the bleaker or the more wooded slopes.

It was very pleasant in the daytime and

as the sun rose higher, the growing warmth brought life to the mountains and they seemed to lose their remoteness and become friendly and companionable. But how they change their aspect with the passing of day ! How cold and grim they become when "Night with giant strides stalks o'er the world" and life hides and protects itself and leaves wild nature to its own. In the semi-darkness of the moonlight or starlight the mountains loom up mysterious, threatening, overwhelming, and yet almost insubstantial, and through the valleys can be heard the moaning of the wind. The poor traveller shivers as he goes his lonely way and senses hostility everywhere. Even the voice of the wind seems to mock him and challenge him. And at other times there is no breath of wind or other sound, and there is an absolute silence that is oppressive in its intensity. Only the telegraph wires perhaps hum faintly, and the stars seem brighter and nearer than ever. The mountains look down grimly, and one seems to be face to face with a mystery that terrifies. With Pascal one thinks: *Le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis m'effraie.*" In the plains the nights are never quite so soundless; life is still

audible there, and the murmuring and humming of various animals and insects break the stillness of the night.

But the night with its chill and inhospitable message was yet distant as we motored along to Almora. As we neared the end of our journey, a turn in the road and a sudden lifting of the clouds, brought a new sight which I saw with a gasp of surprised delight. The snowy peaks of the Himalayas stood glistening in the far distance, high above the wooded mountains that intervened. Calm and inscrutable they seemed, with all the wisdom of past ages, mighty sentinels over the vast Indian plain. The very sight of them cooled the fever in the brain, and the petty conflicts and intrigues, the lusts and falsehoods of the plains and the cities seemed trivial and far away before their eternal ways.

The little gaol of Almora was perched up on a ridge. I was given a lordly barrack to live in. This consisted of one huge hall, fifty-one feet by seventeen, with a *katcha*, very uneven floor, and a worm-eaten roof which was continually coming down in little bits. There were fifteen windows and a door, or rather there were so many barred

openings in the walls, for there were no doors or windows. There was thus no lack of fresh air. As it grew colder some of the window-openings were covered with coir matting. In this vast expanse (which was bigger than any yard at Dehra Dun) I lived in solitary grandeur. But I was not quite alone, for at least two score sparrows had made their home in the broken-down roof. Sometimes a wandering cloud would visit me, its many arms creeping in through the numerous openings and filling the place with a damp mist.

Here I was locked up every evening at about five, after I had taken my last meal, a kind of high tea, at four-thirty; and at seven in the morning my barred door would be unlocked. In the daytime I would sit either in my barrack or outside in an adjoining yard warming myself in the sun. I could just see over the enclosing walls the top of a mountain a mile or so away, and above me I had a vast expanse of blue sky dotted with clouds. Wonderful shapes these clouds assumed, and I never grew tired of watching them. I fancied I saw them take the shape of all manner of animals, and sometimes they would join together and look

like a mighty ocean. Or they would be like a beach, and the rustling of the breeze through the deodars would sound like the coming in of the tide on a distant seafront. Sometimes a cloud would advance boldly on us, seemingly solid and compact, and then dissolve in mist as it came near and finally enveloped us.

I preferred the wide expanse of my barrack to a narrow cell, though it was lonelier than a smaller place would have been. Even when it rained outside I could walk about in it. But as it grew colder its cheerlessness became more marked, and my love for fresh air and the open abated when the temperature hovered about the freezing-point. The new year brought a good fall of snow to my delight, and even the drab surroundings of prison became beautiful. Especially beautiful and fairylike were the deodar trees just outside the gaol walls with their garment of snow.

I was worried by the ups and downs of Kamala's condition, and a piece of bad news would upset me for a while, but the hill air calmed me and soothed me and I reverted to my habit of sleeping soundly. As I was on the verge of sleep I often thought what a

wonderful and mysterious thing was sleep. Why should one wake up from it? Suppose I did not wake at all?

Yet the desire to be out of gaol was strong in me, more than I had ever felt before. The Bombay Congress was over, and November came and went by and the excitement of the Assembly elections also passed away. I half expected that I might be released soon.

But then came the surprising news of the arrest and conviction of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and the amazing orders passed on Subhas Bose during his brief visit to India. These orders in themselves were devoid of all humanity and consideration; they were applied to one who was held in affection and esteem by vast numbers of his countrymen, and who had hastened home, in spite of his own illness, to the death-bed of his father—to arrive too late. If that was the outlook of the Government there could be no chance of my premature release. Official announcements later made this perfectly clear.

After I had been a month in Almora gaol I was taken to Bhowali to see Kamala. Since then I have visited her approximately every third week. Sir Samuel Hoare, the Secretary of State for India, has repeatedly stated that

I am allowed to visit my wife once or twice a week. He would have been more correct if he had said once or twice a month. During the last three and a half months that I have been at Almora I have paid five visits to her.

do not mention this as a grievance, because I think that in this matter the Government have been very considerate to me and have given me quite unusual facilities to visit Kamala. I am grateful to them for this. The brief visits I have paid her have been very precious to me and perhaps to her also. The doctors suspended their regime for the day of my visit to some extent, and I was permitted to have fairly long talks with her. We came ever nearer to each other, and to leave her was a wrench. We met only to be parted. And sometimes I thought with anguish that a day might come when the parting was for good.

My mother had gone to Bombay for treatment, for she had not recovered from her ailment. She seemed to be progressing. One morning in mid-January a telegram brought a wholly unexpected shock. She had had a stroke of paralysis. There was a possibility of my being transferred to a Bombay prison to enable me to see her, but

as there was a little improvement in her condition I was not sent.

January has given place to February, and there is the whisper of spring in the air. The bulbul and other birds are again to be seen and heard, and tiny shoots are mysteriously bursting out of the ground and gazing at this strange world. Rhododendrons make blood-red patches on the hill-sides, and peach and plum blossoms are peeping out. The days pass and I count them as they go thinking of my next visit to Bhowali. I wonder what truth there is in the saying that life's rich gifts follow frustration and cruelty and separation. Perhaps the gifts would not be appreciated otherwise. Perhaps suffering is necessary for clear thought, but excess of it may cloud the brain. Gaol encourages introspection, and my long years in prison have forced me to look more and more within myself. I was not by nature an introvert, but prison life, like strong coffee or strychnine, leads to introversion. Sometimes, to amuse myself, I draw an outline of Professor McDougall's cube for the measurement of introversion and extroversion, and I gaze at it to find out how frequent are the changes from one interpretation to another. They seem to be rapid.



